

# **An exploration into women's choice and premarital experiences of arranged marriages within a South Asian community in Britain. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.**

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***“It’s like subjective isn’t, because someone’s version of something being arranged might be another person’s version of being forced...”***

(Sareena, 2016)

## **ABSTRACT**

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Arranged marriages are a common traditional practice within the South Asian community in Britain (Hemmings & Khalifa, 2013). There is ambiguity surrounding arranged marriage practices as the Home Office (2000) found practices vary from greatly coercive to completely consensual (Hemmings et al., 2013; Marcus, Begum,

Alsabahi & Curtis, 2017). This is problematic as there is a lack of research which focuses on the psychological implications of arranged marriages, considering there is a varying degree of consent and pressure experienced.

Therefore, this study explored the meaning of South Asian women's lived premarital experiences of their arranged marriages, with particular attention to their experience of choice. Seven South Asian women in Britain were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Transcripts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, which captured the complexities and inter-subjective experiences within their cultural context (Smith, 1996). Four themes were identified: cultural and religious belief systems as influencers, the ripple of pressure, decision-making: negotiation of agency and choice, and self and identity. The themes highlight that women are confined within religious and cultural boundaries that guide their decisions. For South Asian women, permission is fundamental and being given a choice, is perceived as an indirect permission for women to exercise agency, to express their own needs and pursue behaviours in line with their identity. For these women, there were varying degrees of choice given to them at each stage of the process. Importantly, the experience of choice was meaningful for women, as this gave an opportunity for self expression and others caring about their wellbeing. Also, women experienced subtle pressure from their parents and the community, to ensure they uphold cultural duties. The premarital distress often led some women to subjugate their needs, and to accept and conform to alleviate psychological and emotional distress. Although some women exercised personal agency and pushed gender boundaries, many felt objectified due to the lack of involvement within the process, which challenged their sense of identity.

This research informs clinical practice which is to provide South Asian women a safe therapeutic space to understand their own needs, tensions and feelings which may help women to feel connected to their experiences. Fundamentally, women voiced their need for more rights and involvement within the arrangement process, as their family's needs were often prioritised. This research also proposes more community work for individuals to be aware of their basic human rights and to understand the subjective element of individual's experiences in arranged marriages. Limitations and future areas for research are explored and discussed.



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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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UK	United Kingdom
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IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
GT	Grounded Theory
NHS	National Health Service
GBLT	Gay, Bisexual, Lesbian and Transgender

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aims to explore the lived premarital experiences of arranged marriages of South Asian women in Britain, paying close attention to understanding their experience of making a “choice”. Through the process of interviewing the women, the main aim was to understand their subjective experiences, interpretations, feelings and meanings of the phenomena in question. The researcher used an IPA methodology, from a critical realist position, which enabled strong qualitative data to be elicited through the open style of questioning. Personal accounts and experiences from the South Asian women will not only contribute to Counselling Psychology research but also influence clinical practice with working with this cultural group.

The following discussion will present the research rationale and arguments for researching women within the South Asian community, and address why the focus is on their subjective premarital experiences of their arranged marriages, from a Counselling Psychologist perspective.

## 1.2 SOUTH ASIAN POPULATION WITHIN BRITAIN

Britain is considered a multicultural society, with many diverse ethnic groups (Burnett, 2016). The largest ethnic minority group within Britain in 2011 was the South Asian community (Office for National Statistics, 2011). The broad umbrella term “South Asian” was coined by Marshall and Yazdani (1999) which refers to people whose cultural or family background originate from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (Anand & Cochrane, 2005).

Arranged marriage practices are viewed as the norm within collectivist societies, and are practised within Britain presently. It is not only prevalent within the South Asian community, but is also practised in non Asian countries - it is said that nearly half of the world’s population is in an arranged marriage (Penn, 2011). There is a common thread of ambiguity surrounding the difference between arranged and forced marriages (Roy, 2011). What separates the two marriage practices is choice and consent; however, the

degree of choice a women experience within an arranged marriage has come under scrutiny (Roy, 2011).

The majority of research within Britain focuses on the issues of forced marriage, due to its severity (Gangoli, Razak & McCarry, 2006; Hemmings & Khalifa, 2013; Hester, Chantler, Gangoli, Devgon, Sharma & Singleton, 2007; Samad & Eade, 2003; Sharp, 2010). However, there is relatively limited research on the psychological impact of arranged marriages. This research will be drawing on forced marriage literature; although it is the severe end of the marriage experience it may shed some light on South Asian women experiences and the psychological impact, as research shows there is some overlap between the two practices (Buss & Burrill, 2016; Gangoli et al., 2006).

The victims of forced marriages may endure a vast amount of physical and psychological abuse in the form of sexual assaults, domestic violence, and verbal, mental, and emotional abuse (Bendriss, 2008; Roy, 2011; Sharp, 2010). Within the Refuge (2008) study, support workers expressed that female victims of forced marriages often feel helpless and isolated from having no control within their marriage (Sharp, 2010). Women endure verbal humiliation and defamation as a form of pressure (Bendriss, 2008). Some feel a profound conflict between opposing duress and being faithful to their families which is highly distressing (Bendriss, 2008). Support services were often encountering “damaged” young girls and women, due their experience of being forced into a marriage or pressured to obey their families’ decision for marriage (Bendriss, 2008, p. 22). In accordance with Newham Asian Women’s Project, some have found ways to manage their emotional distress through self harm, as a way of expressing their pain (Roy, 2011). Fundamentally, women are exposed to psychological and physical distress pre- and post-marriage, which is likely to have a substantial impact on women’s subjective wellbeing (Waite, 1995).

Other research exploring South Asian women’s mental health in the UK has found that gendered and cultural expectation for women to engage in a marital agreement by a particular age, were fundamental stressors to self harming behaviour (Marshall & Yazdani, 1999). South Asian women aged 16-24 years were more likely to self-harm than Whites of the same age group within the UK (Husain, Waheed & Husain, 2006). Many qualitative studies have attempted to understand the variety of factors that contribute to feelings of isolation, anxiety, depression and other psychological

difficulties within this sample group (Anand & Cochrane, 2005). These factors include unrealistic demands made by family (Bhardwaj, 2001), interpersonal family difficulties (Cooper, Husain, Webb, Waheed, Kapur, Guthrie & Appleby, 2006), rigid gendered roles and inequality (Bhardwaj, 2001; Bhugra, Desai & Baldwin, 1999), social and religious pressures (Bhardwaj, 2001), inter-generation conflict over a woman's expectation and responsibility with upholding family honour (Bhardwaj, 2001; Chew- Graham, Bashir, Chantler, Burman & Batsleer, 2002) and challenging cultural conflicts (Merrill & Owens, 1986; Bhugra et al., 1999; Hussain & Cochrane, 2004). Fundamentally, suicides are not just attributed to mental health disorders (Pridmore & Walter, 2013), but that cultural and social factors play a significant role in the causation of self harm (Bhugra et al., 1999). Therefore, it is inevitable that the topic of arranged marriage and issues related to gender and culture will enter the therapeutic space.

Help-seeking attitudes are limited within the South Asian population as having a mental illness is considered a taboo and a sign of weakness (Chaudhry, 2016; Loya, Reddy, & Hinshaw, 2010). As the South Asian community values honour (*izzat*) (Gilbert, Gilbert & Sanghera, 2004; Hester et al., 2007), admitting to a mental illness may affect the chances for an arranged marriage due to the perceived stigma and shame (*sharam*) brought onto the family; consequently, many keep the matters within the family (Corrigan & Miller, 2004; Shariff, 2009). This was apparent by the explored attitudes of the UK Pakistani community when interacting with people who suffer from mental illness. They found that many were willing to interact on a surface level; however, none would consider marriage and only a quarter would engage in a close relationship (Tabassum, Macaskill & Ahmad, 2000).

Another explanation that limits help-seeking behaviour is the belief surrounding the causation of mental illness. It is associated with superstitious beliefs and natural causes and is a consequence of someone losing their faith (Amri & Bemak, 2012; Sheikh & Furnham, 2000). This challenges the western medical perspective that mental illness largely stems from biological causes.

Furthermore, many women experienced a lack of awareness of the support services available to them (Bhardwaj, 2001), or were distrusting of general practitioners due to fears of confidentiality being broken during appointments. Language barriers meant women were often accompanied by someone from their family or community, which

may have led them to withhold information (Gilbert, Gilbert & Sanghera, 2004). Consequently, this may contribute to why there is limited access to mental health services by ethnic minorities specifically South Asians within Britain (Fenton & Sadiq- Sangster, 1996; Pilkington, Msetfi & Watson, 2012).

### **1.3 THE NEED TO STUDY THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE**

Asian women are said to be “bewildered about their own emotions” and exhibit difficulty articulating or understanding the causation of their illness (Fenton & Sadiq- Sangster, 1996, p. 72). Arguably, cross-cultural research has found that certain psychological disorders such as depression are not directly translatable within the Asian language (Hussain & Cochrane, 2004), and that women speak of depression as an illness (*beemaari*) (Burr & Chapman, 2004). Asian women may not discuss their emotional feelings as they are discouraged from freely expressing themselves and their emotional pain; they are expected to behave in an obedient manner to uphold self presentation and public image (Marecek, 2006); therefore, it could be said that they repress emotional distress and present with somatisations of feelings (Ineichen, 1990). For instance, feelings of depression may be “embodied” (Burr & Chapman, 2004, p. 448), whereby aches and pains may portray feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness that perhaps are unexpressed. Therefore, South Asian women may have a complex way of discussing their feelings. Fundamentally, a qualitative enquiry that focuses on understanding the meanings and feelings of the phenomena in question, may help to develop insight into how South Asian women, do or do not articulate emotions, which is crucial to clinical practice as this will help to inform clinical interventions.

### **1.4 RELEVANCE TO COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY**

The field of Counselling Psychology takes a particular interest in individuals experiencing “psychological distress and difficulties associated with life events, transitions, decision-making, and family and social relationships...” (Canadian Psychological Association, 2017). As the premarital phase of an arranged marriage encompasses an interaction of all these factors, this justifies the need for this research enquiry to be conducted.

Western psychological theories are heavily based on western values which raises the question for their appropriateness of application to ethnic minorities, whereby they

attain a more relational view of a person's difficulty (Guo & Hanley, 2015; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Reavey, Ahmed & Majumdar, 2006). As the relational stance is embedded within Counselling Psychology research and practice, this provides further justification for research to be conducted on arranged marriages from this perspective (Manafi, 2010; Milton, 2011).

In order to address South Asian women's counselling needs, this enquiry aims to understand the core beliefs of their culture in order to identify culturally based counselling issues (Shariff, 2009). Madathil and Benshoff (2008) and Eleftheriadou (2010) have called for cross-cultural research in Counselling Psychology to understand the role of culture in psychotherapy. Although training programmes emphasise the need for practitioners to ensure "multicultural competence" with conducting psychological treatment (Brown & Lent, 2008, p. 7), therapists often experience anxiety when discussing racial issues (Patel, 2014). A quantitative study exploring 689 chartered psychologists working cross-culturally with clients, found that less than half would have discussions about cross-cultural issues (Maxie, Arnold & Stephenson, 2006). There is a strong fear of not wanting to cause offence, and therefore therapists may not ask for relevant information on sexual relationships and arranged marriages (Hussain & Cochrane, 2004). To avoid therapeutic impasses, it is recommended that therapists are aware of their own biases and views, as it was found interpretations based upon stereotypical views on Muslim Americans had strong implications on their therapeutic relationship (Ali, Liu & Humedian, 2004). Consequently, when counsellors lack awareness of cultural based issues, this could result in South Asian clients feeling culturally invalidated, and they will terminate therapy due to the development of negative views towards counselling, which may prevent them from reconsidering counselling services (Shariff, 2009; Sue & Sue, 2003).

It is fundamental for Counselling Psychologists to be informed about various forms of mate selections around the world and to build confidence with discussing cross-cultural issues and differences (Asnaani & Hofmann, 2012; Maxie, et al., 2006). Frontline workers working with women seeking support for their forced marriages, found their knowledge on forced marriages, their active listening skills, and empathic manner were, above all else, the most vital to building a trusting relationship (Bendriss, 2008). Crucially, research within this area is to ensure practitioners are fully equipped and aware of various cultures, race and diversity, and how to work sensitively within their



therapeutic practice, particularly when working with women from the South Asian community (Eleftheriadou, 2010; Woolfe, Dryden & Strawbridge, 2003).

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter aims to present a body of literature that will inform the enquiry in question. A critical evaluation of the marriage literature will identify relevant areas for further exploration, which will form the basis and rationale for formulating the research questions.

## **2.2 BRIEF MARRIAGE CONTEXT**

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, marriage is defined as a “legally or formally recognized union of a man and a woman (or, in some jurisdictions, two people of the same sex) as partners in a relationship” (Agarwal & Kapil, 2014, p. 89). The purpose of marriage is varied and may provide a rationale as to why it is a universal phenomenon. Anthropologists believe marriage serves as a protective function for survival to ensure the formation of bonds and reproductive success (Read, 2016). Alternatively, marriage unions have been used to increase social status, political authority, and lineage (Harris, 1989).

Marriage could be defined as a cultural construct as it explicitly varies across many cultural societies around the world. Mainly within western cultures, marriage is a form of companionship, with the foundations based on love and free expression. However, this is not universally accepted, as some non western cultures, particularly the South Asian community, believe the pre-requisite for marriage is not love, but that love develops after marriage (Levine, Sato, Hashimoto & Verma, 1995). Although, western practices have not always promoted “marriage for love”, pre 18<sup>th</sup> century literature has proclaimed that arranged marriages have existed for many decades in England (O’Brien, 2009). The British Royal Family had an arranged marriage and the practice was prominent within the Tudor era, whereby arranged marriages were documented to increase social status, political authority and lineage (Harris, 1989).

There are also other forms of marriage such as same-sex, bigamy, polyandry, polygyny, arranged, forced and child marriage which are perceived as acceptable within various cultures. Therefore, it is significant to understand the meanings of marriage embedded within these cultures. Nevertheless, it is of value to explore arranged marriages within Britain as these challenge current western ideals that advocate that “marriage for love”

and freedom of choice is the predominate premise for partnership (Anitha & Gill, 2009, p. 165; Pande, 2015).

### **2.3 DEFINING AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE**

Arranged marriage is defined as a “contractual agreement, written or unwritten, between two families, rather than individuals” (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002, p. 495). The Home Office (2000) suggests arranged marriage is “where both parties give their full and free consent to the marriage” (Gangoli et al., 2006, p. 420). Literature has identified a varying degree of choice given within arranged marriages (Willerton, 2010). Traditional arranged marriages give the parents a leading role in the arrangements, as marriages are based upon economic factors and family reputations, whereas in more modern arranged marriages, family introduce potential suitors but more choice or involvement is given to the prospective spouses; this is termed as semi-arranged or introduced marriage (Phillips & Dustin, 2004; Willerton, 2010).

Arranged marriages practices are viewed as the “norm” within many collectivist societies. It is prevalent within the eastern Asian hemisphere such as India and Japan but also observed in non Asian countries such as Russia, Africa and Turkey (Penn, 2011). Although, there is no substantial robust statistics on the number of people that have arranged marriages, it is perceived to be more common than anticipated, as nearly half the world’s population have an arranged marriage (Penn, 2011). The commonality of this practice may be a result of no vast difference in marital outcomes between “love” and arranged marriages (Myers, 2010), thus suggesting that regardless of factors considered important to marriage, satisfaction in one’s marriage relationship is not affected (Myers, Madathil & Tingle, 2005).

Arranged marriages were brought into the limelight due to growing concerns over forced marriages within the United Kingdom. The confusion surrounding the definitions, pervaded through media and public debates, and influenced much of the Western view creating a negative perception towards arranged marriage practices (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002 Uddin, 2006; Bowman et al., 2013). The UK government tried to dichotomise the distinctions between an arranged and forced marriage, with the amount of “choice” being the significant factor. In a forced marriage, there is no choice or consent to the marriage or the consent is attained through coercion or duress (Sharp, 2010). However, there is difficulty in drawing up a measurable empirical line in the

context of the arranged marriage process where pressure is identifiably absent (Gangoli et al., 2006). Arguably, empirical measures do not take into account the subjective experience of pressure. Nevertheless, Uddin (2006, p. 212) suggests there is a “fine” distinction as nine out of ten women were able to clearly define the differences between an arranged and forced marriage, meaning a strong awareness of each definition criteria (Sharp, 2010). However, it was reported a participant wasn’t clear about her rights to a choice, or that she could say “no” (Bendriss, 2008; Sharp, 2010). Caseworkers working with forced marriage victims often define what “forced marriages” are to their clients (Sharp, 2010). A probable explanation could be individuals do not understand the term “forced”, due to this terminology not being within their language, or the fact that the experience of being forced is normalised within their culture.

The notion of “slippage” was first termed by Gangoli’s et al. (2006) research to highlight that, in some cases an arranged marriage can slip into a love or a forced marriage. Evidence of this is through participants’ narratives as it was reported within the Refuge project, that in some instances individuals can be “forced into an arranged marriage” (Sharp, 2010, p. 15). Women felt it was “too great of a risk” to object or bargain with, and consequently felt that their arranged marriages were “imposed upon them” (Bendriss, 2008, p. 10; Hester et al., 2007, p. 10). In addition, some women may feel ashamed to confess they have been forced into a marriage, and therefore tell people it was an arranged marriage (Hemmings & Khalifa, 2013). It is noted that there is considerably more literature on arranged marriages slipping into a forced marriage, however, a lack of literature into arranged marriages slipping into a love marriage. Therefore, it is a grey area which highlights the importance of understanding the process and experience of “consent” in greater depth. Fundamentally, this implies that the meaning of these forms of marriages may not be so clear cut, and that definitions can be reductionist, as they fail to acknowledge the complexity and subjective individual experiences (Sharp, 2010, p. 6).

## **2.4 SELF, IDENTITIES, COLLECTIVISM & INDIVIDUALISM**

According to Hoare (2002), having a strong sense of identity provides an individual with a deep sense of well-being and of their “place in the world” (Sokol, 2009, p. 1). There are many schools of thought in the formation of self and identity. Erikson’s

(1968) psychosocial model suggests a person's sense of identity is determined by their ability to negotiate and resolve various "identity crisis" during life stages (Sokol, 2009, p. 1). He asserts that the individual and their social context are intertwined, which is a fundamental aspect of psychosocial functioning (Hammack, 2008; Schwartz, Zamboanga & Weisskirch, 2008). Through exposure to various different contexts, this gives the individual the flexibility to experiment or challenge, for example, their beliefs, sexuality, and religion. The freedom or sanctioning of behaviour by society would dictate the formation of identity (Eysenck, 1998). Through these personal choices across various domains of an individual's life, the individual "realises a variety of inherent potentialities and capabilities", which conceptualises their identity based on these choices (Roland, 1988, p. 330). A social constructionist perspective argues the formation of personal identity is derived from the collaborative interaction between oneself and others within the environmental context (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007). Therefore, a critique of early identity theories is that it ignores cultural aspect of identity, and thus places importance on personal interest or individualism, which is highly recognised in western cultures (Dion & Dion, 1993).

Cultural identity is shaped by an individual's connectedness to a particular cultural group. Hui and Triandis (1986) suggest within collectivist societies, such as the South Asian community, they tend to fit the demands of the in-group members and fulfil the designated roles in order to maintain harmony (English & Chen, 2007). Individuals are likely to attribute group values and attitudes that are influenced by parents and their peers to form their cultural or ethnic identity (Phinney, Romero, Nava & Huang, 2001). There is a strong tendency to adhere to obligations, duties and traditional norms (Rathor, 2011). The stronger the cultural identity, the more likely they will encourage early marriage to meet the needs of the community rather than the individual's discretion (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). Therefore, the self is interdependent; one attempts to preserve relationships even at the cost of the self. Strong parental attachments, interpersonal bonds, and inter-connectedness of the group are highly valued within this culture. Social Identity Theory, proposed by Tajfel (1979) suggests people's sense of identity develops through their belonging to a group (Stets & Burke, 2000). This sense of belonging drives the individual's self esteem and plays a fundamental role in their self concept (Dion et al., 1993). The self is expected to be fluid and changeable across different contexts, thus a person's agency is operating at a group

level (Cross, Gore & Morris, 2003). As one's self concept is in relation to others, going after own personal desires is considered selfish (Segal, 1991). Affiliating with a particular group encourages depersonalisation of an individual's unique qualities to coincide with the attitudes and behaviour of the group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Consequently, having fluctuations and repressing one's sense of self, and accepting this as a part of life, is viewed as a precursor to psychic tension (English & Chen, 2007).

Arguably, individuals not only focus on themselves as group members but also have views of themselves as individuals (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Sedikides and Brewer (2015) proposed the self is defined through three self representations: individual self, relational self, and collective self. The individual self focuses on differentiating themselves from others in order to protect and increase their own psychological wellbeing. The relational self is achieved through maintaining and assimilating strong relational attachments and the collective self is achieved through being included within their social group and having a strong motive to enhance the group (Sedikides & Brewer, 2015). Although all aspects of the self are of high importance, the three aspects may not be equally important to the individual. For instance, within a western culture the individual self would be the priority, whereas within a South Asian culture the relational and collective selves may be of fundamental importance (Sedikides & Brewer, 2015). This may shed some light onto what is meaningful for individuals, as well as how psychological wellbeing is found to increase in South Asian women, who negotiate between all three aspects of identity (Sedikides & Brewer, 2015).

#### **2.4.1 Cultural Conflict**

One's cultural identity is increasingly recognised as a strong aspect of one's identity (Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx & Zamboanga, 2013). The South Asian diasporas have tried to retain their cultural identity and uphold their cultural traditions within Britain (Peach, 2006). This is because their ethnic identity may help immigrants to find a place within a larger society, connect with the cultural traditions, endorse their identity to that which they belong to, and make sense of being a minority group within a larger context (Schwartz et al., 2013). Acculturation studies have postulated that migration can have a psychological impact on an individual's wellbeing, with particular challenges to their personal and cultural identity (Anand & Cochrane, 2005). The Cultural Conflict Hypothesis iterates that the acculturation process can be conflictual

due to the “disparity between traditional and modern attitudes in oneself”, in addition to expectation from society to adhere to social and gender roles (Bhugra & Jones, 2001, p. 219; Phinney, 2003). Therefore, conflicts may arise as second generation South Asians may clash with their migrant parents as they experience levels of difference (e.g. dating) (Hussain, 2017). This may hinder the consolidation of the younger generation’s bicultural identity as their western identity may be consistently challenged (Shariff, 2009). Nevertheless, many British Asian women were able to negotiate their changing identities at different times and at different places. All of the women were proud of being Indian but at the same time wanted to be accepted in British society as British Asian. Many of the women were content to have arranged marriages as a way of holding on to their culture and none of the women dreaded the idea of getting married (Bhopal, 2011).

Research has found having a strong sense of ethnic identity can correlate with high self esteem and a strong sense of wellbeing (Schwartz et al., 2013; Schwartz, Zamboanga & Jarvis, 2007). South Asian men exhibited problems of substance misuse, depression, and suicidality as a result of difficulties with integrating their ethnic identity (Dhillon & Ubhi, 2003). Issues such as open-minded views on marriage, cohabitation, and intercultural sexual relationships were contributors to attempted suicide (Bhugra et al., 1999). It is found that those who are not able to integrate or unwilling to amalgamate their ethnic identity often find it difficult, confusing and frustrating (Schwartz et al., 2013). Zaidi and Shuraydi (2002) reported the perceived attitudes of 20 second generation Pakistani Muslims towards arranged marriages within Britain. They found that Muslim women reported feeling torn between western values and their parents’ belief systems. For instance, women reported experiencing internal conflicts as parents prohibited them from dating, and they were denied any expression of their sexuality, but simultaneously, they were exposed to a western culture that permits freedom of expression and dating. As a result, they are found to behave differently outside the home due to fears of parents not accepting western influences on their beliefs and attitudes (Shariff, 2009). Although the cultural conflict hypothesis emphasises cultural factors as the causation of distress, it fails to explain how an individual alleviates the psychological distress due to cultural conflicts (Burman, Chantler & Batsleer, 2002). Some argue that making choices and adopting certain aspects from each culture can help to form a multi-faceted ethnic identity, which permits them to pursue certain

aspirations and also uphold cultural traditions (Basit, 1997). For instance, Indian women from the United States were found to hide their relationships, as they felt their parents would not understand or would pressure them to either break up or get married (Rathor, 2011). Therefore, cultural identity is considered a multilevel construct, which incorporates both aspects of the self and the group in which an individual belongs (Dien, 2000; Matsumoto, 2003).

South Asian parents fear their children becoming “westernised” and bringing shame upon the family. This may suggest why parents apply pressure on their children to change their behaviour and conform to social expectations (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Shariff, 2009). The meaning of conformity varies, as within the western hemisphere, non-conformity is a representation of an individual’s unique identity, whereas within a South Asian community, non-conformity is described as deviant behaviour (Kim & Markus, 1999). Therefore, individuals will conform to avoid the emotional and psychological distress of being rejected or denied support by the family or community members (Mercado, 2000). Furthermore, the Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) proposes when an individual has an internal conflicting belief, attitudes, or values, this generates a state of “dissonance”, which in turn encourages the individual to seek a strategy to alleviate the distress (Elliot & Devine, 1994). This was reported in research by Zaidi et al. (2002), which captured thick descriptions by conducting interviews whereby the focus was on cognitive processes through examining Pakistani females’ perceptions of arranged marriages. Although the majority of participants felt love was a precursor to marriage, many felt their parents would not understand, and therefore were willing to engage and conform to arranged marriage practices. Consequently, non-conformity to said practices would create a level of uncertainty and confusion. Thus, this may imply that conforming to cultural practices may ensure alleviation of psychological distress. Nevertheless, this research fails to give a real depth in understanding as to why would they engage in an arranged marriage when their values on love conflicts with arranged marriage practices. None of the participants had experienced an arranged marriage, and therefore it could be argued that the research lacked richness in data through the lived experience.

#### **2.4.2 Gender Identity**



The gender roles within the South Asian community are clearly defined. Women are socialised to develop an interdependent self that prioritises their qualities to match others (Inman, Ladany, Constantine & Morano, 2001). For instance, it is encouraged for women to adhere to hierarchical positions through showing the utmost respect to elders and being the conservators of the family honour (*izzat*), by acting obediently and not bringing shame (*sharam*) upon the family (Ahmad, Farooq & Kayani, 2015; Allendorf, 2013; Chodorow, 1978; Dion & Dion, 1993; Gangoli et al., 2006). Traditionally, women were perceived as inferior and were treated like assets, as they were sold off in the form of a dowry, subsequently, they were regarded as burdens on the family as they bore no financial benefits and it was often costly to raise them and marry them off (Bhopal, 1997; Rathor, 2011). However, this has changed, as many young South Asian women are educated and able to make financial contributions. Furthermore, women are expected to refrain from intimate relationships prior to marriage and to uphold their virginity. It is found that those who challenge cultural values and jeopardise the family honour by having a sexual relationship, or even demonstrating independence, can trigger others to force them into marriage (Jaspal, 2014; Samad & Eade, 2003). Bourdieu suggests that compelling someone to marry and to conform to “symbolic standards” is an act of “symbolic violence”, an invisible act of abuse hidden in shared meanings of social practices (Bourdieu, 2001; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 168). On the contrary, Pande (2015) reported women’s narrative demonstrated no indication of victimhood in their experience of arranged marriages. Despite wanting to change the expectations that come with the practice, women were in favour of arranged marriages (Ahmed, 2006; Bhopal, 2009; Pande, 2015). This challenged the western perspective that has stereotyped South Asian women as repressed women who are passive and need saving from emancipation (Burman & Chantler, 2003; Pande, 2015).

Literature on gender inequality is consistently evidencing women as being inferior to men (Ahmad et al., 2005). Males are encouraged to develop an independent self that condones behaviours such as dating, delayed marriage, and socialising with the opposite sex (Inman et al., 2001; Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). It seems women are only able to achieve some status by getting married and having children (Inman, Ladany, Constantine & Morano, 2001), thus oppressing women’s ambitions to further advance themselves by restricting their capabilities, consequently making them inferior (Chambers, 2012). Pasupathi (2002) also argues that increasing freedom in marriage

partnerships does not necessarily raise a woman's status (Yalom & Carstensen, 2002), so arguing against arranged marriage may not be helpful, but rather the focus should be on the need for women's rights to an education and career opportunities (Brown, 2006). That said, more South Asian women in Britain are seeking higher education and employment, and asserting a new aspect of their identity and womanhood (Mohee, 2012). Furthermore, Bhopal's (2009) research significantly explores how education allows South Asian women to negotiate marriage and affirm their individual identity within a British context. It was found that education gives women a degree of choice over the marriage process and they are likely to reject arranged marriages and opt for love marriages (Ahmad, Modood & Lissenburgh, 2003; Bhopal, 2000; Mohee, 2012; Pande, 2015). A criticism of Bhopal's work was that Asian family structures and gender relationships are intrinsically oppressive. Consequently, in order for women to exercise individual agency, they would have to leave their cultural group (Majumdar, 2007). In support, Riley and Burke (1995) found individuals who were not given the opportunity to negotiate their leadership role, which is aligned with their role identity, were less content and unlikely to remain in the group (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Jayakar (1994) highlights in the west there is greater acknowledgment for equal opportunities, individuation in their roles, and acknowledgement of women rights, due to a strong exposure of the feminist movement (Ahmad et al., 2005). Whilst research highlights higher education and a career being an asset for women, being "independent, successful and single" is considered a form of deviant behaviour, as these South Asian women fail to conform to traditional practices (Bhopal, 1999, p. 132). Furthermore, women are also at risk of becoming highly educated and then considered too old for marriage (Ahmad et al., 2003). Experience of the western culture with greater freedom for women may threaten cultural traditions. Subsequently, women from a South Asian community in Britain may experience engaging in gender roles as internally conflicting as a result of differing values between collectivist and individualist societies.

## **2.5 DECISION-MAKING**

There are many factors that influence an individual in making certain decisions to engage in the arranged marriage process. Qualitative research within India by Allendorf (2013) suggests, many positive rationales to opt for an arranged marriage, for instance,

it is perceived as more prestigious or honourable than love marriages. It also benefits inter-generational relationships as they feel they had a role in choosing their child's potential spouse. In more western communities, it is perceived as an alternative way of meeting a potential partner (Bhopal, 1999). Other research argued it is a way of adhering to the cultural tradition which maintains the family honour (Mohee, 2012). Religious beliefs are also found to have a strong influence, as Hindu scriptures view marriage as an obligatory and a sacramental bond between two individuals (Harlan & Courtright, 1995, p. 4). Within Islamic scriptures, the Qur'an also endorses marriage to protect individuals from sexual desires but it is also considered a legitimate relationship that strives to preserve the human race (Adamczyk & Hayes, 2012; Abdul-Rauf, 1972). For this purpose, women are encouraged to engage in marriage partnership, and those that fail to conform to traditional cultural practices and remain unmarried are found to bring disgrace and shame upon the family. For women, this has created a strong internal pressure to enter into an arranged marriage (Bhugra et al., 1999; Hester et al., 2007). Rathor's (2011) study echoes similar findings; however within their study, there is a strong preconceived notion of pressure being present within an arranged marriage, as identified by their research questions. This raises speculation about researcher bias. Nevertheless, this suggests that there are many influencing factors for South Asian women if they remain unmarried.

Parents and family are a fundamental factor within the arranged marriage process (Apostolou, 2007). In early traditional arranged marriages, men and senior authority figures had more influence on marriage decisions because they held more power and status (Shaw, 2001). Families take a proactive role to arrange, as they have a sense of duty to see through their children's marriage and to guarantee family honour is upheld (Samad & Eade, 2003; Shaw, 2001; Uddin, 2006). Within the arrangement process, their roles involve exploring the background of the prospective partners to distinguish the possibility of family and couples' compatibility (Uddin, 2006). There is a strong sense of responsibility to continue patriarchal family lines and to regulate sexual behaviour to ensure women preserve their virginity by restriction of behaviours (Ahmad, Shik, Vanza, Cheung, George & Stewart, 2005; Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; An-Na'im & Chandler, 2000). Muslim parents are reluctant for their daughters to engage with males in case this affects their future marriage proposals (Uddin, 2006). Parents are also negotiating between maintaining bonds and finding a good match to

ensure their children's happiness (Charsley & Shaw, 2006). Nevertheless, there is a strong narrative that parents feel the need to influence their children's decision, as a way of maintaining the conventions of their culture (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Peterson, Kim, McCarthy, Park & Plamondon, 2011). Consequently, individuals may run the risk of "groupthink", a theory initially proposed by Irving Janis (1982) (Rose, 2011). It was reported that fundamental errors in decision-making as a result of group pressure can lead to irrational decisions due to limited critical thinking (Rose, 2011). The importance of the group's image and cohesiveness is a priority, which is problematic as it limits consideration of alternative options in the decision-making process, such as the individual's needs and desires.

Generally, the decision-making experience can evoke negative emotional states such as stress, uncertainty, and conflict, and is considered cognitively demanding. As echoed in Netting's (2006) research, young Indo-Canadians believed that although the marriage issue was difficult, and frustrating, it was ultimately solvable. Alternatively, Loomes and Sugden (1986) reported that individuals aim to avoid the experience of regret or disappointment, and therefore marriage decisions are based on minimising the likelihood of these emotions (Schwarz, 2000). This supports The Choice Goal Framework for Decision Making developed by Bettman, Luce and Payne (1998), which suggests there are two goals for making a choice: to lessen the amount of negative emotions induced by decisions, and to easily rationalise decisions to others (Beresford & Sloper, 2008). Alternatively, the Prospect Theory (Kahnemann & Tversky, 1979) adopted a mathematical model to understanding decision-making for conditions with high uncertainty, relevant to the arranged marriage situation (Ballard, 1978; Beresford & Sloper, 2008; Jaspal, 2014). They argue that within a collaborative decision-making situation people are inherently evaluating the outcome through gains and losses; individuals demonstrate risky behaviour but are also loss averse (Oliveira, 2007). Interestingly, individuals within the South Asian community are not focused on egocentric needs, but prioritise their need to alleviate their parents' emotional distress during decision-making, as this is more imperative than their own wellbeing (Rathor, 2011). This raises questions about whether culture is considered within the decision-making models, as it is seen as a fundamental element for South Asians (Oliveira, 2007).

### **2.5.1 Choice**

Choice is considered a fundamental factor within the decision-making experience in an arranged marriage. It is the degree of choice and agency that draws the line between arranged and forced marriages. As highlighted previously, it is often difficult to distinguish when consent involves pressure, coercion, or force, and therefore it is perceived as a “grey area” (Anitha & Gill, 2009, p. 67). The “paradox of choice” suggests that excessive levels of choice and no choice are detrimental to a person’s wellbeing; however, a choice can enrich an individual with freedom, autonomy, and liberation, which ultimately brings empowerment (Schwartz & Ward, 2004). Nevertheless, research reports there is often a varying degree of choice or say given to prospective spouses, as evidenced by empirical studies. Jejeebhoy, Santhya, Acharya and Prakash (2013) reported that, of those married individuals in India aged 15-24 who had an arranged marriage, 70% of respondents had no say in choice of spouse and 24% expressed a semi-arranged marriage. Allendorf and Ghimire (2013) and Jennings, Axxin and Ghimire’s (2012) research also echo similar findings. On the contrary to British Indian women, they felt arranged marriages no longer exists but were rather ‘introductions’ whereby women had a greater degree of partner choice (Bhopal, 2011). Except for Bhopal’s (2011) research, these named quantitative studies lack qualitative value as they fail to elaborate on what restricts women from expressing their choices. Furthermore, feminists argue that denying women a choice and power is considered an act of abuse as they are treated like property (Yalom & Carstensen, 2002). However, some participants in a study by Zaidi et al. (2002) were confident that they would be given the final say in their marriage decisions. Similarly, the majority of young Indo-Canadians in their twenties felt their marriage decision was ultimately up to them, however, if their parents did find something seriously wrong with their choice, they would carefully reconsider (Netting, 2006). This demonstrates the variability in how “collaborative” the decision-making experience is within families.

The meaning of choice seems to vary within different cultural contexts. It is found that young Asian people claim to be making their own choices, but these choices are made from their parent’s perspective (Storms & Bartels, 2008). Some would argue whether the individual is really making their own choice. Existing literature suggests that a full choice within an American middle class background means a choice independent from others’ influences. Within a collectivist society, individuals are expected to adjust to the societal beliefs and values, and as a result, approval and acceptance from the other is

valued higher than the self (Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus & Suzuki, 2004); therefore choice is interdependent (Schwartz, Markus, & Snibbe, 2006; Stephens, Markus & Townsend, 2007). For example, some Pakistani women have deep trust in their parents' guidance on marriage decisions and it was found that respondents felt their "parents know best" and therefore they didn't rebel against their decisions (Zaidi et al., 2002, p. 507). Arguably, Zaidi et al. (2002) reported many young Pakistani women in Britain would like to modify or replace the arranged marriage tradition with one that has more freedom of choice. Similarly, marriage trends in Southeast and East Asia also report a sharp decline of arranged marriages, particularly for the younger generation. This suggests that women would like a greater degree of autonomy and choice with spousal selection, and for parents to have less control (Bisin & Verdier, 2000; Jones, 2010). On the contrary to marriage trend research in India, that found the practice of arranged marriage is shifting, rather than declining. Young women are increasingly active and are choosing their own husband collaboratively with their parents (Allendorf & Pandian, 2012).

Furthermore, Schwartz and Ward (2004, p. 87) adopted a psychological perspective that implies the freedom to choose has an "expressive value", demonstrating personal character. The choice one makes or fails to make gives life meaning and defines who we are (Greenberg, Koole, Pyszczynski, 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004). For instance, Jaspal (2014) reported participants felt that their parents pressured them into a heterosexual marriage, as they believed their sexual orientation would not be accepted. Consequently, feelings of exclusion, inadequacy, embarrassment, and shame were experienced, as their sexuality identity was threatened. Subsequently, choices can improve the quality of a person's life as they attain and strive towards something that is meaningful and of personal value (Greenberg et al., 2004; Linley & Joseph, 2004).

The issue of pressure within the arranged and forced marriage has come under scrutiny within Britain. It is clear that there is strong evidence of pressure experienced within forced marriages, which can take the form of physical, psychological, financial, sexual, and emotional pressure (Forced Marriage Unit, 2010; Sharp, 2010, p. 6). However, the acceptance of psychological and emotional pressure as a form of coercion has been challenged by Kraler, Kofman, Kohli and Schmoll (2011). In addition, Samad and Eade's (2003) research on community perception on forced marriage did not acknowledge psychological and emotional pressure as a form of coercion (Jaspal,

2014). Arguably, the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal (2008) does identify these as a form of pressure, but would also include cultural pressure, which is often unacknowledged within literature. This suggests the variations in meanings of pressure or coercion is dependent on the individual's subjective experience.

According to Samad (2003), there is no duress within an arranged marriage and individuals are "allowed" to make their own decisions (Uddin, 2006), although, other research highlights that young people felt compelled, obligated, persuaded, coerced and forced into an arranged or a forced marriage for many reasons in Britain (Anitha & Gill, 2009; Dustin & Phillips, 2008). Rathor (2011) reported pressure was induced through feelings of guilt for women being unmarried. It was also found that pressure was communicated indirectly by parents through voicing their expectations. For example, Jaspal (2014) reported parents assertively demanded that young Pakistani Muslim males meet their cultural and religious obligations. They also stated feeling compelled to save family lineage, to maintain their own sense of belonging, self-esteem, and a major aspect of their identity - their family relationships (Jaspal, 2014). In addition, Pakistani Muslim women felt encouraged to participate in an arranged marriage because of parental obligations, lack of finding a spouse, and parental illness (Zaidi et al., 2002). This implies individuals experience various tensions from external forces, which put a degree of pressure on their options and thus influence their decisions.

### **2.5.2 Agency**

Humanist approaches believe each individual aims to grow psychologically to reach self-actualisation and that this personal growth and fulfillment is a basic human need (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010). The evolutionary perspective is broader, and argues that individuals are aiming to meet their own needs in order to survive (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010). Extensive literature on subjective wellbeing found that life satisfaction is based upon many factors, with agency considered one of them (Diener, Lucas & Scollon, 2006; Veenhoven 2000). The behavioural approach tries to explain how personal agency develops. Bandura (2006, p. 169) believes it is through "transactional experiences with the environment", by recognising oneself as the agent of the actions through making links with the cause and effect. Through this experience, infants learn to differentiate themselves from others, leading to the development of the agentic self. One may question whether this is applicable to a collectivist society that values a shared

identity and does not encourage individualism. Alternatively, Deci and Ryan (2000) believe there are biological drives that precipitate the development of agency in order to meet the psychological needs of an individual: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. However, environmental and cultural factors can challenge the development of these areas. For instance, Roland (1988) observed through psychotherapy that Indian clients often made major life decisions with their family members. This may imply their upbringing may prevent the ability to make decisions autonomously (Chirkov, Ryan & Sheldon, 2010).

There is a strong assumption that women who have an arranged marriage are perceived as victims of their South Asian culture (Pande, 2015). Due to strong cultural values and obligations towards their roles, such as protecting family honour, there is an inability to exercise personal agency in order to meet their obligations (Enright, 2009; Miller, Das, Chakravarathy, 2011). However, Mines (1988) argued that collectivist-hierarchical views are often a “distorted picture of a person and of motivation, because the person is depicted as passively trapped within a frame of model without any mechanism for generating change” (Chirkov, Sheldon & Ryan, 2011, p. 11). As peoples’ agency is socially constrained, to exercise agency or free will, one must have a choice (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Identified previously, the degree of choice varies within an arranged marriage; however, it is important to highlight that not all arranged marriage practices are the same. There are opportunities for women to exercise choice and agency. For instance, in Pande’s (2015, p. 10) research, women were found to exercise some choice and agency through actively negotiating with their family in order to gain personal wishes through their arranged marriages. The World Development Report (2012) highlighted women are able to exercise personal agency by raising their bargaining power through increasing their ability to earn and control their income, in order to be part of the decision-making, to have a voice, and to increase their position within the household (Boudet, Petesch & Tusk, 2013). Netting’s (2006) study found 27 Indo-Canadians of mixed genders were able to break the news of whom they were dating to their parents, make their case, argue and sometimes threaten, until a decision was reached. Parents were more flexible than they imagined, and young people became creative and resilient agents within the decision making process (Netting, 2006). In support, it was found that those who were able to exercise some degree of agency were of Indian origin, educated, middle class, and adopted openness to religious beliefs



(Pande, 2015). However, there is lack of understanding as to how other ethnicities within the South Asian diasporas exercise agency within arranged marriages (Sorrentino, Cohen, Olson & Zanna, 2009).

## **2.6 GAPS IN RESEARCH**

Overall, taking into account the extensive research on arranged and forced marriages highlighted relative gaps within our knowledge. The research does not shed light on how women negotiate around various identities, and what are the tensions and dilemmas faced when going through the initial stages of an arranged marriage process. The research raised concerns regarding issues surrounding South Asian women's response to cultural and gender conflicts, and their coping strategies for managing distress, by conforming, repressing their emotions and hiding their true desires. There is a strong narrative of South Asian women prioritising the needs of others, but literature does not highlight what women's needs are in relation to their desires. If women are coping silently during a major life transition such as marriage, then uncovering the complex and intricate nuances in their experiences will facilitate a better understanding of South Asian women's internal and external world, in order to adapt support services, and clinical practice to target interventions to support these women.

Furthermore, there is limited understanding of the decision-making process within arranged marriage literature. The experience of choice is mainly understood from a western perspective in a dichotomised way: whether there was a choice or not; however, it is far more complex, as there are various tensions and beliefs that influence an individual's choice. As evidenced by literature, the arranged marriage process evokes many conflicting feelings due to the multiple factors (family, expectations, culture, pressure, community, gender) involved in the decision-making process. Particularly in the context of arranged marriages in Britain, it may be helpful to understand how South Asian women negotiate between family, gender, cultural expectation, and their own aspirations, whilst going through the process of an arranged marriage. Malhotra (1991) put forward a lack of academic literature related to agency and women's experience in the decision-making for arranged marriages. After 26 years, Pande (2015) still echoes the need for more exploration on cultural and gender negotiations by women within arranged marriage in their context. Therefore, this warrants a unique enquiry into solely

focusing on exploring the subjective premarital lived experiences of South Asian women who have had an arranged marriage.

The majority of research within Britain focuses on understanding forced marriages; however there is limited current literature on arranged marriages. Due to the subjective interpretations of the definitions, this has caused some confusion around what is an arranged and forced marriage. Arranged marriage may be perceived as forced as it may involve some, if not all the negative elements of a forced marriage. In addition, the issue of “slippages” and the voices of people in the “grey” area are unknown. Therefore, this research will aim to cover this gap within literature and add to the existing research by exploring the topic further.

Furthermore, if the concepts of arranged marriages are changing, then it is possible that expectations, gender roles, and identities are also developing. This warrants further research to be conducted in Britain to try and understand this evolving phenomenon.

## **2.7 METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Whilst the existing literature has given valuable insights into the arranged marriage experience within Britain, there is a slight variation on the methodological approaches adopted. For instance, Jaspal (2014) adopts a phenomenological perspective using a specific South Asian homosexual male population, whereas Zaidi et al. (2002) used a thematic analysis methodology to examine perceived attitudes of arranged marriage, however this does not explore the lived experience. Other studies largely focused on those who experienced forced marriages (Gangoli et al., 2006; Samad & Eade, 2003; Sharp, 2010). Fundamentally, there is no IPA study, that solely focuses on the lived premarital experiences and the subjective meanings attributed to arranged marriages of South Asian women in Britain, from a Counselling Psychology perspective.

Furthermore, Pande (2015) examined marriage practice of men and women within the South Asian community in Britain, but failed to disclose the methodological approach used. It is often problematic when it is difficult to pinpoint researchers’ epistemological standpoint as they are not clearly presented; therefore, there is difficulty in identifying methodological issues, thus indicating a lack of transparency. The researchers’ inter-subjectivity and reflections about the South Asians’ “world” within the process is ignored. This raises the question of the authenticity of the research, as interpretations

and the subjective meaning are not evaluated through researchers' reflexivity (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). Considering this is integral to the research process and therapeutic practice, exploring South Asian women's narrative of their subjective premarital experiences of their arranged marriage, and engaging in reflexive practice, would meet the core philosophy of qualitative enquiry that values the subjective experience.

## **2.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This justifies a distinctive enquiry into solely focusing on exploring the subjective premarital experiences of South Asian women in Britain, who have had arranged marriages. The following research questions emerged through the engagement with the literature:

- (1) What was South Asian women's premarital experience of arranged marriages in Britain?
- (2) How did South Asian women in Britain experience choice within the decision-making process?

# **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

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## **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will begin by providing a brief overview of the major philosophical paradigms informing Counselling Psychology research. Fundamental to the enquiry, the

researcher's epistemological position was explored and clearly identified (Morrow, 2007), thus providing a rationale for the qualitative nature of the methodology elected in order to address the research questions. The latter section of this chapter will detail with transparency the methods of sampling, data collection, analysis, and reflexivity. Lastly, ethical considerations are identified, and the importance of reliability and validity are discussed.

### **3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGMS IN COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY**

According to Morrow and Smith (2000, p. 250), the “goodness” of qualitative research is dependent on the basis of the paradigmatic underpinnings and quality of the research. Fundamental to the enquiry, the researcher's epistemological positioning is required to be stated explicitly and reflected upon throughout the research process (Morrow, 2007). Paradigms describe a system of ideas, or world views, used by researchers to generate knowledge, guide research, and establish research practices (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). With diverse philosophical underpinnings, paradigms assume variability on how nature of reality is viewed (ontology), how knowledge is constructed (epistemology), and the values of the researcher (axiology) (Ponterotto, 2005).

The field of Counselling Psychology has developed during the recent decades and has adopted various research methodologies (Ponterotto, 2005). Research within the psychological field has been dominated by the positivist and post-positivist paradigm (Larsson, Brooks & Loewenthal, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). Positivists adopt a realist position – the notion that reality has an existence independent of the knower (Ponterotto, 2005). Their aim is to identify absolute knowledge through a scientific method, which relies on derivable logic with observable and empirical experiments, to confirm or disprove hypotheses in order to discover causal laws that are generalisable about the nature of the phenomena (Fossey et al., 2002; Neuman, 1994). The researcher adopts an objective detached position, as reality exists separate from the researcher (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). This type of research adds value to psychological research as it provides broad analysis of the phenomena for a larger group of people (Griffin, 2004). Empirical studies have emerged, as “scientist-practitioners” emphasise evidence-based practice to inform clinical practice, which offers substantial justification of the use of quantitative research (Gelso, 1993, p. 1; Ridley & Laird, 2015).

There were many challenges by scholars and researchers in response to the positivist approach. A major criticism of the positivists' paradigm is the reductionist view of human experiences to simplistic empirical data, with a lack of substantial understanding of subjective experiences, meanings, and the relational interaction between the knower and the researcher (Fossey et al., 2002). It can be argued that positivist views are not fully in line with the principles of Counselling Psychology, as the emphasis is placed on individuality of the client and inter-subjectivity (Cooper, 2009).

Post-positivism emerged through criticism about the pure positivists' stance. Similar to positivism, Popper (1959) affirms a critical realist position that argues reality is objective, but is subjective to the individual, and therefore imperfectly apprehensible (Scotland, 2012). Post-positivists adopt quantitative methods but are more open to qualitative and mixed methods (Gelo, 2012), although some suggest both opposing paradigms share the same tenets of theory, fallibility of knowledge, and a value-laden enquiry process (Bryman, 1984). Fundamentally, this enables data collection and analysis, and provides meaning contained in quantitative accounts (Gelo, Braakmann & Benetka, 2008).

Publications within Counselling Psychology research still presents with over-representation of quantitative studies (Ponterotto, 2005). This highlights the need for more variation in methodology within Counselling Psychology (Willig, 2008). An alternative methodology is qualitative research, which generates richer descriptive insights of experiences and engages in meanings of how people make sense of the world (Willig, 2008). There are many qualitative methodologies that try to grasp an individual's subjective experience from various paradigms (Smith, 2015, p. 4). One example is that interpretivists are able to gain the subjective experience through interpretations of the data. The researcher collaborates through co-constructing meanings to try to understand how this is embodied within language or through human behaviour (Schwandt, 1994). Therefore, it is dependent on the researcher's epistemological positioning that drives the appropriate paradigm for a research methodology. The following three paradigms serve as a form of qualitative research.

Phenomenology became of interest as a philosophical method that aimed to overcome objectivism by studying the conscious experience in the way in which people experience their world (Charmaz & McMullen, 2011). Phenomenological approaches

focus upon an individual's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, and seek to access the inner life world. Constructivists will criticise phenomenologist research as they fail to acknowledge language as a vessel to understanding. Arguably, language does not transmit feelings, it can be argued as being too one-sided and neglecting other important psychological or biological factors (Barker, Pistrang & Elliott, 2002). For instance, phenomenological philosopher, Merleau-Ponty, described that knowledge that is not explicit, conscious, or articulated can be embedded in the body (Langdrige, 2007). Fundamentally, it is not possible to dismiss the human body as a physical entity or reduce it to a discourse. Wertz (2005) argue phenomenological methods are congruent with the Counselling Psychology philosophy. They both have humanistic underpinning, and an interest in the subjective experience – focusing on meaning-making and embedding the subjective experience within a context (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

The critical-ideological paradigm also advocates multiple realities that are constructed experiences, mediated through power relations embedded within social and historical context (Ponterotto, 2005). Criticalists hold a dialectical stance whereby the researchers' aim is to empower oppressed groups towards changes and transformation (Ponterotto, 2005). Methods within this paradigm aim to deconstruct text to learn about hierarchies, oppositions, and contradictions. Such methods include interpretive biography, narrative enquiry, grounded theory, and ethnography.

Lastly, the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, developed against the positivism position, proposed a relativists' ontology, which suggests multiple realities within its context are apprehendable and subjective (Ponterotto, 2005). This positioning values the lived experience, context, and meanings which are co-constructed, understood, and interpreted through the interactive researcher-participant dialogue (Black, 2006; Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001). The researcher acknowledges how their own beliefs and assumptions can influence the co-construction of meaning, and therefore knowledge cannot be dichotomised by the researcher. Research adopting an interpretivist-constructivist positioning includes ethnography, narrative enquiry, grounded theory, discourse analysis, and phenomenological methods (Gelo, 2012; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2007).

### **3.3 ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANCE**

Within this thesis I will draw upon the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, whilst also acknowledging phenomenological ideas. My ontological belief is one of critical realism, which accepts that there is an external reality that exists independent of human intellectualisation; therefore, the variation in an individual's meaning of their experiences is considered probable because of their subjective experience and interpretations of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Fundamentally, this may explain why there are various constructs such as arranged, love, and forced marriage phenomena. Due to the complexity of reality, with many interwoven factors, such as culture and socioeconomic status for example, in influencing human behaviour and perceptions, the social constructivist epistemology is considered. It suggests that knowledge is co-constructed by the researcher and the knower, whilst seeking an insider perspective to understand the lived experiences and meanings attributed to those going through, or having experienced, an arranged marriage (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Therefore, my aim is not concerned with seeking the truth, but rather to give a voice and to understand the multiple perspectives of reality, which are subjective to each participant, in order to evaluate it critically.

### **3.4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Given the aims of this research, a qualitative methodology would be the most appropriate approach as it generates descriptive, psychological insights of experiences and engages in meaning of how people make sense of the world (Willig, 2008). This is in line with the Counselling Psychology philosophy, which emphasises embracing humanistic and relational value systems that engage with meaning, co-construction, and interpretation to understanding clients (Woolfe et al., 2003). Interviewing is one of the main qualitative methods to comprehensively explore, describe, and interpret the subjective meanings of the phenomena and experience given by the research participants themselves (Finaly, 2006; Willig, 2008). Qualitative researchers accept that it is impossible to set aside one's own perspective completely, and do not claim to do so. Nevertheless, they believe that they aim to bracket existing assumptions and their own values through self reflection (Willig, 2008).

A quantitative method was not considered appropriate due to its poor attention to context, the lack of the participants' voice, and the personal biases and interpretations made by the researcher, which are not considered (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002).

Arguably, it is important to recognise reality as complex and multidirectional, and which influences human behaviour. Fundamentally, qualitative research moves away from fixed views and reductionist descriptions, and embraces the complexities through exploration (Kincheloe, 2008). The experience of women in arranged marriages is a complex issue with many interwoven factors; therefore, a qualitative enquiry was deemed to be the most appropriate.

Qualitative methods of analysis such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Narrative Inquiry, Grounded Theory, and Thematic Analysis were discussed on its appropriateness in conjunction with my research aims.

First, GT is compatible with critical realist tenets, and has the potential to incorporate subjective experiences and uncover meaning. However, it has been argued that GT subscribes to a more positivist epistemology – producing theory that is concerned with facts and generalisable to the community in question (Oliver, 2011). Secondly, the methodology is concerned with preoccupation of uncovering social processes, thus limiting applicability to more phenomenological research questions. As research is not concerned with producing theory or simultaneously maintaining a subjective and objective stance (detached closeness) during data collection, this methodology does not coincide with my research aims (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Thematic analysis could be a potential method due to its flexibility and ability to be used within different theoretical frameworks. It adopts a critical realist position as well as positioning itself between essentialism and constructionism (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Arguably, some would suggest such flexibility can lead to inconsistency and lack of coherence (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that if thematic analysis is not used with an existing theoretical framework, then it has limited interpretative power, as it is unable to anchor its analytic claims beyond mere descriptions, which may lack depth as a methodology.

According to narrative researchers, narrative enquiry focuses on the subjective experiences and social processes that shape these experiences (Frost, 2011). These researchers are more concerned with how and why the stories under examination are constructed and expressed. The epistemological position is therefore more constructivist (Frost, 2011). As narrative enquiry is focused on more systemic interpretation, it is not fully in accordance with my epistemological position or research aims.



### **3.4.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

The qualitative research approach chosen for this study is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, founded by Jonathan Smith in 1996. IPA methods centre on “inter-subjectivity”, which explores in detail the human lived experience and how people make sense of their life experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 17). Fully understanding the lived experience is not achievable due to a lack of consideration of embodiment. Nightingale and Cromby (1999) explained the problem with some bodily experiences is that they cannot be described by language, and “important aspects of human experience are located outside of language” (p. 113). Therefore, it is important to recognise that we cannot fully access a client’s internal world, but through reflexivity we can try to get as close as possible.

IPA is interpretative and also takes into account the relational element between the researcher and the participant. It acknowledges the researcher’s voice whilst trying to make sense of the participant making sense of their experiences – double hermeneutics (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Smith et al., 2009, p. 35).

Secondly, IPA is both phenomenological and social constructionist, in that it is concerned with personal experiences but also involves interpretation, whilst context is taken into consideration.

IPA is an idiographic approach concerned with detailed analysis (Smith et al., 2009). Subsequently, it is considered more psychological as it employs a greater focus on giving detailed and nuanced accounts of thoughts, feelings, meanings, and experiences within their unique context (Smith et al., 2009). Wertz (2005) argues phenomenological methods are in line with Counselling Psychology’s interest in subjective, contextualised experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Overall, taking into consideration other qualitative methodologies in conjunction with my research aims, epistemological position, and that it encourages the participants’ voices to be heard in order to understand their lived experiences. It would suggest that IPA is the most suitable methodology for its flexibility, openness, and exploratory nature in order to answer my research questions.

## **3.5 RECRUITMENT STRATEGY**

The initial research (forced marriage – see Chapter 6) strategy was to recruit participants through voluntary organisations such as Karma Nivarna, Bowhaven, Asian Women's Resource Centre, The Sharan Project, and Hopscotch Women's Centre. The approach taken was to attend Asian Women's groups and other Asian support groups to speak about the research. Bowhaven was the only organisation that allowed me to present my research to their Asian Women's group; however, due to language barriers, it was difficult to communicate the details of my research and what would be required. Other volunteer organisations did not respond, or declined to take part due to lack of resources, so this led to alternative means of recruitment and a change in research objective. The internet was used as a recruiting tool for participants. General information about the research and a poster (Appendix 4) were posted on social media and forums associated with arranged marriages. Social media sites such as Facebook, Mumsnet, Twitter, and student forum sites were used to recruit. The poster failed to recruit any participants; subsequently this could be a result of the leading question presented within the text, which may have inhibited people from coming forward. Participant may have fear of speaking about their experiences of pressure, or the assumption made by the researcher may not be aligned with the participants' experiences. (See Reflexivity chapter for further reflections). Nevertheless, the snowballing technique was able to make use of participants as a resource through word of mouth; others were able to recommend people they knew who had experienced an arranged marriage. This strategy was the most effective form of recruiting, subsequently seven participants were recruited.

During the recruitment process, it was recognised that South Asian women were a hard to reach group. It is noted that there is no Pakistani participants represented within the South Asian sample. Although some were initially recruited, four participants were unable to take part in the study due to reasons such as the husband refusing participation (a potential participant asked for permission to take part in the study, which may suggest a power dynamic, with males being the decision makers). Other reasons were a newborn baby in the family, change of mind, and concerns regarding the family finding out. This may indicate some of the wider issues concerned with South Asian women and with a more varied range of ethnicities including Pakistanis the data may have reflected some of the wider issues. Furthermore, it was thought that my being an Asian

researcher may hinder participants taking part due to the fear of their community finding out.

### **3.6 SAMPLING**

IPA has an idiographic approach, and encourages homogenous sampling by purposefully selecting a small sample size in order to understand the phenomena within a particular context (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Therefore, a small number of participants were selected purposively via opportunistic and snowballing techniques. Due to the particular aims of the research being exploration of their lived experiences, in order to explore the phenomena, all participants will have encountered the arranged marriage experience with the purpose of expressing rich insights (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, due to the research aims and the philosophical underpinnings of this research, South Asian women who have experienced or are experiencing an arranged marriage were recruited.

#### **3.6.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA researchers aim for a “fairly” homogenous sample, for which the research question will be meaningful (p. 49). Relative homogeneity is achieved through specificity and the number of inclusion and exclusion criteria for the sample (Robinson, 2014). The following illustrates the participant requirements by setting out the exclusion and inclusion criteria within this study:

- **Female**

Previous research has found certain triggers to arranged and forced marriages affected women (Enright, 2009; Jensen & Thornton, 2003). Therefore, this justifies an exploration of women’s lived premarital experiences of their arranged marriages.

- **Over 18 years of age**

According to research, parental influences on marriages tend to mean earlier marriage (Ghimire, Axinn, Yabiku & Thornton, 2006). Many that are under age may be in the process of being arranged for their marriage; therefore, the option was taken for only adults to take part.

- **Residing in the United Kingdom**

As homogeneity is important, it was central for the sample to be within a cultural frame (UK) so detailed examination of participants can be explored.

- South Asian ethnicity: Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan

As this is a ‘hard to reach group’, and due to time constraints in accessing individual samples within the community, this justifies for a wider population to be recruited (Smith et al., 2009). However, this can pose as a methodological issue due to the limitations in achieving a full homogenous sample. This drawback may result in difficulties during the data analysis and interpretation stages. Subsequently, inferences in details from a particular cultural frame would be invalid within this study (Smith et al., 2009). Nevertheless, a diverse view of the phenomena in question will be captured within this research, due to the range of ethnicities within the South Asian sample. This methodological limitation will be reflected upon within the thesis.

- Experienced or experiencing an arranged marriage

Selected participants have a shared experience of the phenomena in question and demonstrate a willingness to voice those experiences in detail (Smith et al., 2009).

- English fluency

Participants’ own words and nuances within their language are highly significant to understanding their lived experiences. However, with a translator, there would be a triple hermeneutic process with a fear of meaning being lost through the process of translation. In addition, Jones and Kay (1992) suggest not everything is translatable (Esposito, 2001). Therefore, the decision was made to exclude non-fluent English speakers to minimise the risk in discrepancies at the interpretative stage. Arguably, according to phenomenologists, language is a medium to express pre-existing meaning, which implies, regardless of the language, the meaning will permeate through the language available to the participant (Willig, 2012).

- Not in a forced marriage

Those that are in a forced marriage will be excluded from the study, as there are ethical concerns, as this may pose a risk or a safety issue for the participant and the researcher.

### 3.6.2 Research Participants

Overall, seven participants were recruited within this research, comprising four Indians, two Bengalis, and one Sri Lankan, aged between 27 and 59. Six participants shared retrospective accounts of their experiences, whereas one participant was awaiting her marriage. Pseudonyms were given in order to protect the identity of the participants (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Participants' Demographic Details**

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Marriage Status
Sonia	27	Sri Lankan	Married
Prisha	29	Indian	Married
Deepika	29	Indian	Married
Reeya	53	Indian	Married
Aisha	59	Indian	Married
Zara	42	Bengali	Married
Sareena	29	Bengali	Pending Marriage

### 3.7 DATA COLLECTION

A semi-structured interview (see Appendix 8) was administered using open-ended questions to elicit a rich verbal discourse. The level of flexibility enabled the researcher to adapt and engage with participants' ideas (Smith et al., 2009). The interview schedule had approximately 10-15 questions that focused on participants' lived experiences to elicit thoughts and meanings. The questions were informed by broad concepts within the literature, discussion with the research supervisor, and IPA guidelines (Smith, 2004). Particular areas of interest were to understand cultural values and beliefs on marriage. This was a broad question to open up discussion on understanding their cultural experiences and to build rapport, in order to reduce participants' anxieties with discussing more personal or possibly sensitive issues (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The

researcher continued to further explore participants' experiences of getting married, to understand if any support was received, and the implications of these experiences.

It is inevitable that researcher biases can enter within the qualitative research process, but it is the researcher's duty to acknowledge these biases. It is likely that the investigator may engage in the concept of conformability to ensure their research findings support their own beliefs regarding the outcome of their research. Therefore, in order to unravel researcher bias, the researcher can perform an interview schedule on themselves to identify the assumptions they hold. The outcome of the interview was recorded in my research journal. Through this experience, I recognised a negative opinion of societal beliefs towards women having to have an arranged marriage by a certain age. Bearing this in mind, it was important to reflect upon this during my data analysis to avoid researcher bias. In addition, to ensure reliability, a pilot interview was conducted to identify any ambiguities within the schedule and further feedback was requested in regards to the schedule. The pilot interview with Sonia was conducted and transcribed, which was insightful in terms of making further adaptations to the interview schedule. It was noted that due to the numerous questions within the schedule this had implications on the length of interview and depths of the answers. It was also important to make the questions simpler, such as "What views does your culture have on marriage?" instead of "What are your culture's views on marriage?" as complicated questions led to difficulty in understanding and answering the questions. As the interviews progressed, my technique in interviewing developed as I was able to demonstrate flexibility with the schedule, as participants did not follow the questions in order. I learnt that being open and curious was crucial, as closed questions minimised the participants' expression. As the interviewing progressed, I learnt to delve more into the emotional aspect of their experiences as there was a tendency to stay on a more cognitive level. Also, this experience highlighted the importance of the terminology used within the schedule; for instance, the meaning of "arranged" and "forced" marriage is subjective. Understanding participants' point of reference can help to develop a nuanced discussion around how they perceive or experience arranged marriages.

Furthermore, at the end of the interview, the participants were also given the opportunity to add any more information that they may not have been asked or that they hadn't covered. This is to ensure the participant had the opportunity to have their voices heard and the freedom to express themselves.

Interviews were conducted in various locations, such as at University of East London, private hire rooms, or the public library. Certain factors were taken into account in determining the location, such as convenience, comfort, neutrality, and safety for the participant and researcher.

### **3.7.1 Recruitment Procedure**

Prior to the interviews, all participants were given an information sheet to read and an opportunity to ask questions. Through verbal or email communication, the researcher asked the participants how they viewed their marriage to understand their point of reference, rather than projecting the researcher's own understanding of arranged and forced marriages. Through this process the researcher tried to ascertain whether the participants had engaged in a forced marriage. No participant expressed they had a forced marriage. Once participants agreed to take part in the study, a collaborative arrangement was made for a convenient time and place to meet for the interview. During the interview stages, participants were given the information sheet (see Appendix 5) and consent form (see Appendix 6). The participants were briefed about the nature of the interview, and were informed of their rights and of details concerning ethical considerations, e.g. confidentiality and anonymity. The demographic questionnaire (see Appendix 7) was given to retrieve basic demographic details such as age, ethnic background, marriage status, etc. If the participants were still interested in partaking, then they were given an opportunity to ask any questions and to verbally remind them of their rights to skip questions if they were feeling distressed. They also had the option to withdraw from the study with no implications. The aim was to make participants feel comfortable by giving them a general outline of the types of questions asked, e.g. experience of culture. The interviews lasted approximately 55 to 90 minutes, and were all audio-recorded using a Dictaphone. Once the interviews were completed, participants were debriefed and given a debriefing letter (see Appendix 9), along with an opportunity to ask questions and to give feedback in relation to the interview. On their debriefing letter, participants were encouraged to contact external support services if they felt any distress. All participants were given pseudonyms to adhere to anonymity. Brief reflexive notes on observations, thoughts, and interview experience were written in my research journal, both post-interview and during the transcription stages to allow reflexivity and immersion in the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, according to the guidelines presented by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009).

### **3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

In accordance to BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009), the research aimed to hold moral responsibility to protect research participants from any harm or impact on their wellbeing. Therefore, to meet ethical requirements, ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee (UREC) of the University of East London (See Appendix 1). The following demonstrates how the researcher aimed to meet ethical requirements:

During the recruitment process, all participants were given an information sheet fully explaining the purpose of the study and describing the management of the data within this research. This demonstrates full transparency within the study and that no deception was involved. Informed consent was clarified and obtained prior to interviewing the participants.

Previous studies highlighted resistance to speaking to researchers from the same community, as they fear that their anonymity will be compromised due to overlapping of networks within minority communities (Gangoli, et al., 2006; Hester et al., 2007). Therefore, necessary steps were taken to verbally explain and reassure participants of confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were informed that data provided would remain confidential, and would be safely and securely stored on the researcher's computer, which is password-protected, and hardcopies stored within a locked cabinet in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. They were assured that recordings and transcripts would be password-protected, and anonymity would be ensured by using pseudonyms to identify participants. Both recordings and transcripts will be destroyed once the mandatory five year retention period is complete.

Due to the nature of the study, the interview could possibly be distressing for the participants. Therefore, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the process of the research, and it was reiterated that participants had the right to refuse to answer questions and to withdraw from the study without any implications. No participants requested to withdraw from the study, nor refused to answer any questions. If disclosures were made in regards to risk concerns, the interview would be



ceased and the participants were notified that confidentiality would be broken and were informed as to who it would be escalated to.

Following the interviews, participants were fully debriefed and given a debriefing letter with researcher, supervisor, and external support agencies' details. All participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback and ask further questions. Due to the nature of the research topic, participants were encouraged to seek external support if they experienced any distress, although none was reported.

The safety of the researcher and participants was considered by organising interviews in a safe environment, such as, at the University of East London, private interview rooms or the library. The researcher's supervisor was informed of times, dates, and location of each interview.

### **3.9 DATA ANALYSIS**

The data was analysed using Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) IPA guidelines to ensure quality of analysis. Furthermore, research supervision was given to analyse qualitative data set by an experienced researcher. The following demonstrates the analysis procedure:

#### **3.9.1 Individual Data Analysis**

First, participants' transcripts were individually analysed by entering the participants' world through immersion, which involved multiple readings of the transcripts whilst listening to the audio recording. Initial notes and exploratory notes were generated and documented on the right hand side of the transcript, with emergent themes written on the left hand side. At the initial stages, the researcher was noting free flowing ideas, concepts, contradictions, personal reflections, significant comments, thoughts, feelings, etc. The exploratory comments are considered a useful 'analytic tool', whereby annotations are made based on description of the content, use of language, and conceptual understanding (See Appendix 10).

#### **3.9.2 Emergent Themes**

In order to develop the emergent themes, the researcher must comprehensively paraphrase the initial notes and visually check with the transcript to ensure it is closely linked. Using a higher level of abstraction, the next stage is to formulate concise phrases

that are more psychologically conceptual (Smith et al., 2009). Through the process of hermeneutics, the researcher is not only reflecting on the participants' words but also the researcher's interpretations (Smith et al., 2009), thus highlighting the importance of reflexivity. By chronologically grouping themes as they present themselves, the researcher then categorises similar themes together before forming subthemes, and then arranges these into clusters to create master themes (Smith et al., 2009).

### **3.9.3 Master Themes**

The fourth stage of the analysis is to create master themes, which involved formulating a table of themes in chronological order (see Appendix 11 & 12). A list of quotations from the participants' narratives was used to evidence the theme that encapsulated the essence of the participants' thoughts, emotions, and experiences of the phenomena in question. Themes were disregarded if they were not strongly supported or relevant to the research questions.

### **3.9.4 Cross Data Analysis**

This process of analysis is applied to the other transcripts to identify further new themes or patterns to form an overall consolidated list of themes to a new higher level order of themes (see Appendix 13). The research attempted "bracketing" to minimise the previous analysis of data to influence the following analysis of the transcripts (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013, p. 1). Although bracketing is important, there is no protocol on how this would be achieved. Therefore, writing in my research journal and taking a short break may help to separate each participant's analysis.

See the overall master themes in Table 2 within Analysis section (Chapter 4).

## **4.0 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

Smith et al. (2009) recommend following the guidelines proposed by Yardley (2000) in order to meet the criteria for validity and reliability within qualitative research. The broad principles are as follows:

### **4.0.1 Sensitivity to Context**

Qualitative research that demonstrates sensitivity to context include sensitivity to the existing literature, recruitment of purposive sample, appreciation of the interaction

between researcher and participant, and demonstration of sensitivity to the data (Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2000). As the researcher, my aim was to develop an understanding theoretically and historically to develop a great depth of knowledge on the complexities regarding the phenomena, as illustrated within the Introduction and Literature Review (Chapter 1 & 2) section. In order to develop sufficient quality of data, using my Counselling Psychology skills I was able to remain empathic, neutral (at times), and curious, to alleviate any power dynamics. This was to demonstrate the participants are the experts of their lives, so they feel comfortable enough to express their experiences. Through reflexivity, there was a consideration taken of the relational dynamic between myself and the participants during interviews. For example, if a participant was saying something I agreed with, then it was noticeable that my head nods would increase. Furthermore demonstrating sensitivity to the data, the use of the participants' voice within the analysis section will support my argument and validate my interpretations by presenting several extracts.

#### **4.0.2 Commitment and Rigour**

According to Yardley (2000), commitment to the research is exhibited through the level of attentiveness during the interview process. Engaging in reflexivity suggests a level of personal commitment by the researcher to ensure richness of data and a commitment to the participants that their voices will be heard.

Rigour can be achieved through saturation of data and the “completeness” of the analysis (Smith et al., 2009, p. 181). To enhance credibility and methodological rigour, I attended peer supervision group and individual research supervision as a way of “increasing confidence in the research data, creating innovative ways of understanding the phenomena in question and revealing unique findings” (Thurmond, 2001, p. 254). Monthly supervision ensured continuity with the research as well as reflection on analysis of data with peers and others, to encourage research rigour.

#### **4.0.3 Transparency and Coherence**

To demonstrate transparency, the stages of research were explicitly detailed during the write-up of the thesis (Smith et al., 2009). Further emphasis on transparency is evidenced by the researcher reflexivity to provide a rationale for decisions made, as well as to highlight the epistemological position of the researcher (see Reflexivity Chapter

6). To ensure a coherent piece of research, the chapters will be drafted and re-drafted and read by my research supervisor, as well as other IPA researchers, to provide another perspective as the reader.

#### **4.0.4 Impact and Importance**

Lastly, Yardley's (2000) final principle postulates that the research be of interest, importance, and has an impact. This research aims to develop awareness of the lived experiences of those who have experienced or are experiencing an arranged marriage. In the long run, this research aims to challenge therapists' own biases when working with different cultures. It can also help inform clinical practice to develop confidence working cross-culturally, and help practitioners to adjust western theoretical models to be culturally appropriate for individuals. Furthermore, the research will shed some light on themes and knowledge to contribute to the wider literature, such as family, marriage, and gender. Fundamentally, it will develop more awareness of the different forms of marriages within British society.

## **CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF DATA**

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### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter aims to offer insight into how the participants, within their context, make sense of their premarital experiences of their arranged marriage and their experience of choice. Primarily the basis of this chapter will entail accounts of the four master themes and their component subtheme (see Table 2), with each theme evidenced by verbatim extracts from the seven participants. This is to ensure close focus on the meaning of the participants' experience.

<b>Master Themes</b>	<b>Subtheme</b>
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<b>Cultural and Religious Belief Systems as Influencers</b>	No Option for Singlehood Urgency to Save Face
<b>The Ripple of Pressure</b>	Pressure to Adhere to Duties The Relentless Marriage Talks - Shush!
<b>Decision-making: Negotiation of Agency &amp; Choice</b>	“OMG” - The Unknown Experience of Choice Negotiating Agency Managing Distress: Don’t “Rock the Boat” - Compliance & Acceptance
<b>Self &amp; Identity</b>	“Done Deal” - Objectified Self Internal Identity Conflict: You Before Me Pushing Gender Boundaries

**Table 2: Master Themes and Subthemes**

Each master theme exhibited within the table was central to addressing the research questions:

- (1) What were South Asian women’s premarital experiences of their arranged marriages?
- (2) How did South Asian women experience choice within the decision-making process?

The themes reflect aspects of the participants’ subjective experience to a varying degree, with focus on the lived experience. It is important to note that all the themes interlink due to dynamic interactive factors related to the participants’ wider cultural, religious context and interpersonal relationships.

For clarity, minor hesitations were removed from participants’ extracts. Missing narrative was symbolised by dotted lines within square brackets [...].

## 4.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE ARRANGED MARRIAGE PROCESS AND DEFINITIONS

In order to follow the participants' narrative, it is of value to provide the reader with a generic contextual framework from the data of the arranged marriage process.

The process of an arranged marriage begins with an initial marriage proposal to the family for the potential bride/groom. The family would analyse the proposal on whether the family and bride/groom are compatible (educational level, job, appearance etc). The families will discuss the proposal. If the potential family meet their criteria, then the family would proceed to investigate through the process of "*fact finding*", whereby enquiries are made within the wider community for potential information on the family and the bride or groom. Once the families' are satisfied with all the information gathered, then the proposal is disclosed to the bride/groom. Based on the information provided by the family, the bride/groom will make a decision whether they wish to proceed forward. If no, then the parents would inform the other family of their refusal to proceed further. If yes, then some parents would arrange a meeting with the other family, whilst others may exchange details of the potential bride/groom, for them to communicate privately. If a decision is made for the families to meet, then a date is organised for an introduction to be made. At this point, the bride or groom may or may not get an opportunity to talk "*privately*" during the meeting. This is dependent on families' beliefs, their level of flexibility and openness to meeting privately. The bride/groom will decide whether they would like to meet again and proceed with the arrangements. The families may allow the potential suitors to meet up in person but this is due to the discretion of the family. Within a certain time frame, the suitors will need to decide whether they would like to get married and discuss their "*decision*" with their parents. If both suitors and families are in agreement, then an engagement ceremony is arranged as a declaration of their commitment.

Following the process of arrangement, the quote below by Sareena highlights the fact that the definitions are "subjective".

*"I guess like there may be a bit of a grey area because you may think arranged means forced sometimes. Where's the distinction like there maybe it's like subjective isn't because someone's version of something"*

*being arranged might be another person's version of being forced".*

(Sareena, P36, 1064-1099)

This suggests that individuals have different definitions of arranged marriages depending on their associated experience. Therefore the following data analysis should bear in mind that participants' accounts are dependent on their interpretation of their subjective experiences.

### **4.3 MASTER THEME ONE: CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF SYSTEMS AS INFLUENCERS**

#### **4.3.1 Overview**

This master theme encapsulates how cultural and religious beliefs influence and shape the participants' decision to have an arranged marriage. All the participants experienced an expectation to marry by a particular age, with some experiencing a sense of urgency to engage in marital arrangements. The subsequent subtheme 'No Option for Singlehood' describes participants' limited experience of choice in refraining from marriage expectations. To follow, the second subtheme, 'Urgency to Save Face' illustrates how all participants' were aware of the rules of no intimacy prior to marriage. Consequently, women felt a strong sense of responsibility to protect their self-image, evade feelings of shame and uphold the family honour by getting married quickly.

#### **4.3.2 No Option for Singlehood**

All the participants described an entrenched awareness of the importance of marriage within their culture and religion. As highlighted within this theme, there is a fundamental expectation to marry by a particular age. Consequently, participants' described their lack of marriage choice, with a few participants' readiness to marry not taken into consideration. Those that decided to pursue their own desires and to delay the marriage process, reported to have experienced a detrimental impact on their self-worth and their psychological wellbeing. This is due to the lack of acceptance of their lifestyle from the community.

Prisha's account encapsulates the majority of the group experience in highlighting the importance and meaning of marriage within her culture:

*“It’s extremely important in our culture, very I don’t think I’ve come across many people hardly anyone that isn’t married. Even if they are older or younger whichever way they you know even if you haven’t had a great first or second marriage they do expect the person to be married and to kind of have their partner and form their family”.*

**(Prisha: P2, 46-55)**

Prisha’s narrative describes the rarity of encountering “*hardly anyone*” that opts for singlehood and goes against the cultural norm of marriage. It could be said that those who do not follow the cultural norm are perceived in a negative way. Prisha elucidates that regardless of individual circumstances (age/divorce), there is a strong expectation to adhere to cultural practices within her community. It seems the motivational factors for marriage are the opportunity to engage in an accepted partnership and to expand the family lineage.

Two participants experienced an internal conflict in pursuing their own desires versus the expectation to get married:

*“Really and truly at that stage of my life I wasn’t completely ready. I still wanted a year or two find my feet, to get myself a good job and to enjoy life that sort of period between Uni and when you’re free you get to have a lot more independence you’ve got money because your working you can enjoy life a little bit more. But for me the way I’ve been brought up to always listen to my parents and sort of if they say something it’s like yeah fine yeah I’ll do it like..”* **(Deepika, P2, 55-68)**

Deepika’s extract’s reveals her internal conflict of not being “*completely ready*” for marriage which consequently goes against her parents’ wishes for her to marry. She voices her desire for some independence by establishing stability through employment and having the freedom and monetary funds to “*enjoy life*”. However, the ingrained values of “*always listen*” to your parents describes a sense of sacrifice, as she is expected to subjugate and accept their requests without hesitation, which is represented by her response “*yeah fine yeah I’ll do it*”. The lack of discussion suggests her parent’s needs are more important than her own.



Aisha echoes the predictability of life events (marriage) within her life:

*“I can’t really recall the feelings I just kind of “oh” [high tone]. I thought that was that, the map, that was the map of my life and that’s what’s going to happen... That I was going to have an arranged marriage, I would marry an Indian, probably live with a family, you know I might be able to nurse part time, I would have to cook and I would have to clean be subservient in that way”.* (Aisha: P7, 195-206)

Aisha’s narrative demonstrates her difficulty in recalling her feelings at the time. However, her raised tone of voice when she said “oh” suggests feeling surprised at the thought of marriage followed by an immediate acceptance. Fundamentally, her narrative captures a strong sense of having no control or agency over her own life choices as she expresses “that was that”. There is a strong sense of acceptance of her fate as she uses the metaphor “map of my life” to describe her predetermined life journey. The list described how predetermined Aisha’s life is and the areas that are perceived as none negotiable (arranged marriage, Indian partner). Aisha has a strong awareness of her role as a married woman, as she described the domestic responsibility she is expected to adhere too; her sense of identity forms from her practical ability to perform domestic tasks and being a compliant and “subservient” member within the family. Aisha questions the possibility of continuing her career, which suggests her right to work is dependent on her families’ decision.

In contrast, two respondents described that not conforming to traditional marriage has a detrimental impact on a women’s identity:

*“It’s kind of.. I don’t know I guess people look down on you in a way because your kind of you know you’re just being an independent women and you’re not, you haven’t settled down and you haven’t had kids it’s like, it’s like. It’s just this expectation that you should get married and there’s no other like expectation like there’s no it’s like get married or you know there’s they don’t see the other side of it. It’s like you have to get married and that’s it”.* (Sareena, P30-31, 897-911)

Sareena suggests in a speculative manner that disapproval is experienced because the community “*look down*” upon those that delay marriage to pursue their own desires of independence. It seems being an “*independent women*” is portrayed as a negative as these women stray away from the cultural norm and possibly threatens the collective cultural identity. Therefore, emphasis is placed on women to “*settle down*” which seems to bring comfort to the family. She expresses that they “*don’t see the other side of it*” which implies her parents are misunderstanding her point of view, possibly due to rigidity in their thinking. Despite having independence through delaying her marriage, her expression “*that’s it*” and “*there’s no other*” may describe her position of being constrained by the lack of options she has. With the lack of community acceptance and limited choice, she implies that in the end you have to marry.

#### **4.3.3 The Urgency to Save Face**

Six participants’ strongly emphasised that a sexual or intimate relationship with an individual of the opposite sex, prior to marriage commitments, is prohibited due to strong cultural and religious beliefs. Participants described upholding family honour is predominately at the heart of their culture; however it is also intertwined with women’s reputations within society. A strong sense of responsibility is placed on women to maintain a level of decorum, to ensure their family and their own reputation remains untarnished. Subsequently, participants’ narratives echo a strong fear of women jeopardizing the family honour. In order to save “face” within society, there is a strong encouragement for early marriage.

For the majority, Aisha powerfully captures participants’ awareness of the rules within their culture:

*“And so when I lived in the nursing rooms I found I would go out for a coffee or whatever but it was so alien to me because I know I wasn’t supposed to go out with boys, certainly never sleep with them”.*

**(Aisha: P4, 93-108)**

It seems that residing within nursing quarters gave Aisha the permission and the opportunity to engage in mixed social interactions. However it seems as if she is pushing the rules, as she uses the term “*alien*” to describe her experience of treading on unfamiliar ground by interacting with someone of the opposite sex. It could be

perceived that dating may eventually lead to sexual intimacy, which is unquestionably forbidden. Although, Aisha interacted with males, her expressions of “*wasn’t supposed to*” and “*certainly never*” demonstrates her strong awareness of the rules and that all these stages of interaction are considered unacceptable.

Zara also acknowledges the rules but expands on the internal conflict between personal needs versus religious beliefs:

*“Well.. religion is like I think probably for us the.. because sex is not allowed before marriage naturally and it’s a natural thing for men and women to have you know that desire of wanting to be loved and you know and being loved. And so throughout life you’re always meeting people who you could fall for. So that’s why it is encouraged that children get married you know as soon as they get that kind of desire, it’s best that they are married to someone rather than having casual sex with someone and you know then getting pregnant and for the other person not taking any responsibility”.* (Zara: P29-30, 864-884)

Zara’s narrative describes the rule for no sex before marriage stems from religious beliefs. She normalises that sex is part of a loving relationship; however it is forbidden as it goes against religious beliefs. Her repeated use of “*natural*” suggests that these beliefs strongly contradict what she perceives as a natural human need. She continues to raise an everyday issue whereby there is temptation all around with people “*you could fall for*”. Subsequently, this poses various opportunities to engage in sexual relationships with people. It seems that there is a fear of breaking religious rules which leads parents to encourage early marriage when those sexual desires are more likely to surface. She deems that “*casual sex*” has strong implications as there is no one to take responsibility if women get pregnant. In agreement, Zara describes marriage as the “*best*” option to contain desires and to protect women from being shamed within the community. There is a strong sense that someone needs to take responsibility and protect women, which seems to inherently identify women as vulnerable.

Many participants echo the urgency for women to marry in order to protect the family from being shamed and defamed, as described by Prisha below:

*“Well I think first it’s tradition just purely because boys are boys and girls just.. they’re the family name the family respect. So our parents are more kind of I don’t know afraid or scared that the girl will go off and find somebody else or run away or get out the culture. So that kind of name round the communities is extremely important to older cultured parents. So I think that’s why they want the girls to get married quickly so they don’t have a chance of kind of going off with who they like or kind of defame the family”.* (Prisha, P4, 104-113)

Prisha’s “*boys are boys*” expression illuminates males are given the rights and the freedom to be themselves and have all their actions accepted. On the contrary for girls, as Prisha pauses as she attempts to describe “*girls just...*” suggesting women are more complex to explain and are not given the permission to be themselves. Prisha alludes to the idea that women have a strong responsibility to protect their reputation as their actions are attached to the family name. She voices the need for parents to control women due to a strong fear of shame and that “*kind of name*” being brought upon the family which may circulate within the community. In addition, Prisha suggests this belief is a generational attitude, as she implies the younger generation may not place importance on upholding the family name. It seems there is a powerful urgency to pass on this responsibility, and the burden of women by marrying them off “*quickly*” to avoid any opportunity to “*defame*” the family. Marriage is considered a form of protection for women and the family, as it binds them into an approved union which restricts their chances of “*going off*”. Paradoxically, Prisha’s narrative demonstrates the power women have to defame the family but also feelings of powerlessness as they experience having no choice in marriage timings. This may demonstrate a fear with women holding a fundamental amount of power, which may trigger restrictive behaviours on women by elders.

## **4.4 MASTER THEME TWO: THE RIPPLE OF PRESSURE**

### **4.4.1 Overview**

This master theme encapsulates how cultural and religious beliefs create a rippling effect, as everyone feels pressured to abide by these beliefs within the arranged marriage process. The first subtheme “Pressure to Adhere to Duties”, enriches the study in understanding the various forms of pressure experienced by the respondents and their

experience of feeling obligated to adhere to their responsibilities. To follow, the second subtheme “The Relentless Marriage Talks – Shush!”, uncovers the subtleties and direct forms of pressure through marriage talks, which are induced in participants to feel fear and anxiety.

#### **4.4.2 Pressure to Adhere to Duties**

This subtheme highlights the pressure experienced by parents and participants to acknowledge their roles and responsibilities within their culture. Six participants described their experiences of a range of pressures in the form of social, cultural, family, peer, gender and time pressure, during the various stages of the arranged marriage process. The pressure is used to enforce marriage beliefs, protect the family/parental honour, encourage marriage responsibility and ensure women continue the family lineage. The pressure seems to have a rippling effect; starting with the community down to the bride, to ensure each person is aware and adhering to their responsibility. Due to difficulties with feelings of anxiety and fear, there is a displacement of these feelings on to the next generation in the form of pressure.

Reeya’s extract provides a valuable insight into her own experience of pressure as it ripples down from the community:

*“In terms of I think a lot of it was to do with culture pressures that I think now people aren’t.. you know there isn’t that kind of pressure on families to say, you don’t get the peer pressure from relatives or extended families “Oh your daughter’s not married or your son’s not married and you know why not?”. Yes you still might get a little bit of that happening, you still do but it’s not like it’s not at the forefront of people’s minds you know. People say “oh when they’re ready they’ll get married” we’ve got, they’ve got more of a excuse now to say well when their ready they’ll get married or they don’t live here or you know kind of thing. Whereas at that time it was sort of you know if people says something like that to you it was taken upon us to like kind of an insult to you like “oh my God they said this about me”. My daughters not married or my son’s not married and I have to get married and because everybody was, it was 99.9% children were getting married at*

*very early in their teens probably 18, 19, 20, 21 it was the done thing”.*

(Reeya, P44, 1283-1311)

Reeya concludes that the majority of the experience is a result of “*cultural pressure*”. She implies that being the 0.01% of those that are not married was against the cultural norm and there was a need to conform; with no other options as it was the “*done thing*” at the time. She importantly illuminates a shift in perception towards marriage as it is no longer at the “*forefront of people’s minds*”. Reeya implies a sense of acceptance as parents are now able to give “*excuses*” for the lack of their children’s marriage. However it seems that in her time, insults were received by her parents for the lack of their children’s marriage. This appeared to have strongly outweighed any concerns of their children’s wellbeing and their readiness for marriage. The personal insults not only condemned the parents but also the rest of the family as Reeya depicts it is “*taken upon us*”. As a result, parents may have a fear of their own, or family image being slandered and therefore experience self-pressure to get their children married early, in order to alleviate their own anxiety and protect their own and the families’ image.

Contrastingly, not only do parents feel pressure to adhere to their responsibilities but also five participants experienced these feelings too. As captured within Aisha’s narrative:

*“So I never heard of anybody being beaten or sent off to India or you know I think it’s very subtle it’s that sense of doing your duty”.* (Aisha,

P14, 413-416)

Importantly, Aisha’s perception of pressure is presented in an extreme form of physical violence as she uses “*beaten or sent off*”. But she also implies that pressure is understated and takes a “*very subtle*” form. She describes pressure in respect of “*doing your duty*”, which seems to convey an awareness of her own responsibility within the culture. The obligation to engage with marriage commitments willingly without any resistance is what is expected from her.

In addition, three other participants also describe a time pressure to become a mother, as highlighted in Deepika’s extract:

*“People would be done and dusted with 1 2 3 kids however many they wanted.. in their 20’s so they will be done and dusted by their 30’s. To*

*think that that's gonna happen is.. why is that going to happen to you?  
So then you start thinking oh no what if I can't have kids for that reason  
should I now get married?" (Deepika, P10, 287-300)*

Deepika's narrative powerfully affirms women's roles as child-bearers within the culture. She uses the term "*done and dusted*" twice to possibly illustrate a sense of completing the child-rearing duties within a certain time frame. Consequently, this awareness may be putting indirect pressure on Deepika as she didn't conform to this socially determined time scale. She engages in questioning herself by asking "*why is that going to happen to you?*". Her expression "*oh no*" describes a fatalistic possibility of infertility if she continues to delay her marriage. This is detrimental to a woman's status especially when women are valued for their roles as mothers. Furthermore, Deepika seems to engage in "*what if*" as she worries about the possible outcome and subsequently contemplates her decision to marry to try and increase her chances of fertility.

#### **4.4.3 The Relentless Marriage Talks - Shush!**

This theme demonstrates the strategies used by others in the form of direct or "*passive*" communication, which was experienced as pressurising by the participants within this study. The pressure was described in a subtle way but was experienced through relentless marriage talks. Some respondents also experienced scaremongering tactics to encourage them to consider "*good*" marriage proposals or even marriage. Ultimately, participants' self-concept was threatened if they continued to delay their marriage, and they risked being perceived in a negative way if they remain unmarried. The pressure appeared to have caused various emotional distresses in the form of feeling overwhelmed, sad, frustrated and fearful. Consequently, to alleviate the psychological distress, participants re-evaluated their decision to marry, in the hope that marriage conversations would stop.

Deepika and another participant describe the indirect pressure experienced:

*"So yeah there's a lot of pressure but not active pressure it was... a bit passive almost. And my mum would just keep on bringing up conversations about different little things and everything would will sort of lead back to one thing eventually. And there wasn't a single*

*day that would go by after the age of 22 where it wasn't spoken about in my house". (Deepika: P6, 165-175)*

Deepika's narrative voices her level of frustration by her tone of voice as she describes her intensity of pressure within her household. She highlights that pressure was not "active" but rather subtle. She continues to illuminate the importance of marriage to her mother as she would often persistently "keep on bringing up conversations". It seems her mother wants Deepika to keep marriage in mind as she would talk about "different little things" with "everything" tapering towards the pressing issue of Deepika being unmarried. There seems to be a lack of respite from the topic as she highlights there was not a "single day" it wasn't spoken about, thus implying a constant brainwashing.

Alternatively, two participants expressed the pressure in a more direct manner whereby scaremongering tactics were used to raise negative points about the participants:

*"So.. not just my parents but even people in the community they start saying "oh well you know the later you make it there won't be any guys left in the community" because everyone starting to get married off they either have met somebody, people have already met at uni or work obviously they've already met. It was almost like the stocks are running out [laughs]. So it was like well um 50% of people met people, 50% of guys have met someone at uni and you've only got 50% of guys to effectively have in terms of choice and the longer you wait those start going to get, the accounts going to get lower and lower they are going to meet someone and they are all going to start getting married. In my head actually I don't want to be left with the 10 at the end that I have to choose from.. the leftovers so to speak. It's really bad but that's the way it almost gets portrayed to you and when your living in the that environment constantly um you can't see beyond that". (Deepika: P4, 89-111)*

Deepika implies "not just" her parents but also the community were pressuring her. In the narrative, there is a strong sense of fear being induced at the thought of "there won't be any guys left" within the community. It is conveyed that it is in her best interest to get married now rather than later. Subsequently, as Deepika iterates the statistics, this implies that the pressuring tactics used, justifies their behaviour. Furthermore,



Deepika's voice increases in pace whilst she lists how people have met, this may signify her own anxiety of not having met anyone. She laughs at the metaphor the "*stocks are running out*" to again emphasise the lack of supply of men. Her continuous discussion of the limited choice and supply left if she continues to delay her marriage, may be masking her own fears of the limited time she has. As a result, she reflects on her own desires of not wanting "*to be left with the 10 at the end*". It seems that if you are unmarried you are perceived in a negative light and lack worth, which is captured by her use of adjective "*leftovers*" to describe these people. Deepika may feel a sense of guilt and shame as she says "*it's really bad*" but contends with the idea of being brainwashed by the community due to the "*constant*" messages, which Deepika seems to have internalised. She describes her difficulty in thinking differently as she highlights "*you can't see beyond that*".

Similarly, Sareena further highlights how influential others (parents) are within the process and the impact this has on her emotional wellbeing and self-concept:

*"Yeah I felt obviously it's not the greatest feeling to be told that you may not find a suitable husband. Yeah, so it did feel at the time it did feel a bit upsetting knowing that you know your family are saying that "you might not find someone good and you may not be able to get married, um you know you're getting older". And all those points being raised is so at the time it did feel a bit overwhelming and difficult to hear but at the end I kind of considered you know I thought it I thought it was the best decision in the end."* (Sareena: P23, 676-692)

In Sareena's extract, she connects with her sadness as she expresses feeling "*upset*" by her family. It could be said that she is surprised by her families' points and may have expected a more supportive role. It seems her self-worth was challenged as they emphasise you may not find "*someone good*" because you are "*getting older*". Thus suggesting that women have an expiry date whereby their worth deteriorates with age. This may have caused some emotional and psychological distress as she expresses feeling overwhelmed as it was "*difficult to hear*". As a result, she repeats "*I thought*" twice which suggest her reflections on what was said, and considered the marriage

proposal in the end as she believed it was the “*best decision*”. Thus highlighting how influential the community and parents are within the decision-making process.

#### **4.5 MASTER THEME THREE: DECISION-MAKING: NEGOTIATION OF AGENCY & CHOICE**

##### **4.5.1 Overview**

This master theme captures how participants’ negotiate within the confinements of the set boundaries exhibited at various points during the decision-making process. The first subtheme “Experience of Choice” highlighted the different experiences and meaning of choice. The majority expressed having a choice of partner and a strong sense that choice is something that is “*given*”. Furthermore, those that were given a choice felt heard, were able to express themselves and felt their decision was accepted. Others had experienced feelings of empowerment and a strong sense of self-worth as their needs and emotional wellbeing is of concern. The next subtheme “Negotiation of Agency” highlighted that during the decision-making process the majority of the participants aimed to increase their personal agency through direct communication or using others to ensure their ultimate goals are met. The next subtheme “Managing the Distress Don’t “Rock the Boat”: Compliance & Acceptance” describes how participants managed their internal distress by being compliant and accepting of their circumstances. Lastly, the subtheme ““OMG” - The Unknown” describes the high levels of uncertainty experienced within the process as a result of limited time, opportunity and privacy to really “*get to know*” their potential partner fully.

##### **4.5.2 Experience of Choice**

The experience of choice was varied amongst the majority of the participants, six participants reported having partner choice, with one participant feeling as though she didn’t have a choice or any say concerning her marriage. Many echoed the importance of having their voices heard, the space to truly express themselves and for their decision to be accepted. On a broader perspective, one participant felt she had no life choice and four participants expressed not having a marriage choice. The experience of a choice was fundamentally important as participants felt a sense of empowerment, independence, responsibility and autonomy, which signified a sense of their self-worth as people cared for their needs and wellbeing.

Deepika and another participant described how choice is relational and influenced by those within their social context. As captured by the extract below:

*“I did have a lot of choice like if I said no ultimately my mum would be ok with it”.* (**Deepika**, P30, 893-895)

Deepika’s narrative quantifies her choice by suggesting she had “a lot”. Although, her experience of having “a lot of choice” is dependent on whether there is another person who is accepting of that decision and will “be ok with it”. In her circumstances, the narrative suggests that when Deepika said “no” her mother would “ultimately” be accepting of her choice. Hence implying decisions are dependent on other’s approval of the decisions.

Furthermore, several of the participants echoed that having a degree of choice was an empowering positive experience, as Prisha articulated:

*“It meant I was having some control. Also that I was important and what I needed or wanted mattered. As it was life changing decision, I felt responsible and like an adult”.* (**Prisha**, P47, 1358-1370)

Prisha describes that by having a choice in her marriage she experienced “some control”, which may suggest having partial responsibility and power. Fundamentally, her parents giving her partial control and not full control meant so much as she described feeling “important”, it appears this significantly meant they were concerned with her needs and desires. Her self-esteem seems to have risen as her needs “mattered” to others. Being given the responsibility of having to make a major decision which can be “life changing”, may have encouraged Prisha to be autonomous, responsible and develop some maturity which contributed to her feeling like an “adult”.

Alternatively, Reeya describes some of the important factors that led her to feel she didn’t have a choice:

*“I didn’t really have a choice in it. I didn’t have any any say in how or whether I wanted A. If I wanted to get married and whether I was happy. I think that simple word of saying yes everything is ok almost just seal the deal that’s how I felt you know”.* (**Reeya**, P27, 796-803)

Reeya's emphasis and repetition of the word "any" suggests the lack of marriage discussion and her voice not being heard. There was a disappointing and sad tone to her narrative as she lists all the things that were not done by her family. Reeya was asked whether "everything is ok?" which she thought meant that her uncle was asking about her wellbeing and misunderstood that he was directly asking about her marriage decision. The word "yes" had such a big impact which was experienced as life changing. Her metaphor "seal the deal" describes a strong permanency with her decision and a lack of option to change her marriage circumstance. Reeya goes beyond the notion that choice is just saying a "simple" yes or no, but highlights the strong consequential implications to these words.

In addition, Aisha emphasises the lack of life choices:

*"... I was just thinking I don't particularly feel anybody's asked me in nearly in 40 years or given a choice. Life has a choice, I would liked to have got divorced but I haven't. My husband didn't want a divorce. My children wouldn't have my children wouldn't want me to divorce and the father to divorce and it feels like I've been waiting for permission and I don't know if that's about the cultural thing. And of course nobody gives you permission and at least that's my experience. Nobody gives you permission not to not get married. Nobody gives you permission to divorce or anything that is out of the accepted you know culture". (Aisha, P23, 679-697)*

There is a strong undertone of sadness to Aisha's narrative as she describes her experience of not being given permission to act upon her wishes. She asserts her rights as she expresses "life has a choice" but this contradicts her culture's belief. She implies that choice is linked to a "cultural thing" as it is something that is "given" but on multiple occasions she reiterates "nobody gives you permission". The powerless undertone suggests feeling stuck as she waits for permission to be given. Culturally it seems others needs take priority as she values her husband and children's wishes above her own needs and happiness. A women's identity is one of obedient, submissive and of compliant nature as she expresses her lack of movement towards divorcing her husband. Within the Asian culture it is possible that giving permission to women to pursue their own desires, may contradict the Asian cultures view on how women should behave.

Consequently, “*choices*” are not given as it may disrupt the harmony of cultural traditions.

#### 4.5.3 Negotiating Agency

This subtheme captures the participants’ experience of agency within the arranged marriage process. Two participants described negotiating their personal agency through communication, as a way of attaining more autonomy and freedom. Other respondents experienced a lack of personal agency due to restricting circumstances and therefore employed proxy agents to achieve their needs on the participants’ behalf. Respondents also demonstrated how a parent’s authority and a strong nature to be obedient, led two participants to be compliant and not exercise personal agency.

Sareena gives an example of how personal agency could be negotiated through communication:

*“I guess it’s just communicating with them like parents in terms of what you want and there was a bit of like obviously they had to become more lenient on that side because at the end of the day it’s their daughter’s happiness at stake. So it was a lot of you know there were difficult times but it’s just talking to them I guess and making them understand it’s not that easy that it’s a marriage at the end of the day you know”.* (Sareena: P6, 171-184)

Sareena adopted a more relational approach to communicate her needs and desire for more freedom as she attempts to make her parents more “*lenient*”. Her pressure to make her parents understand her was to try and counterbalance the pressure of her “*happiness*” being at stake. Sareena presents with real strength and high self-esteem as she confronts her problems and attempts to address them with her parents. She describes experiencing some resistance with her parents and it felt “*not that easy*”. But for Sareena, the decision of marriage weighs heavily “*at the end of the day*”, and she asserts that her wellbeing is of high importance.

Contrastingly, two participants expressed having no personal agency and were constrained by external factors. This was highlighted by Reeya’s extract below:

*“I’m going to be married to this person soon and that was all that crossed my mind at the time. But I was too frightened to even say anything to my dad, you know he was just ecstatic and happy. So I kept my views to myself”.* (Reeya: P25, 727-735)

Reeya was conscious of her marriage arrangements and this seems to be causing some emotional difficulty as she engaged in rumination which is captured by her phrase *“that was all that crossed my mind”*. She describes a strong sense of being obedient as she was unable to confront her father’s authority, due to feeling *“frightened”* to approach him with her concerns. She observed how *“ecstatic”* he was and therefore decided to respond in such a way to not disrupt her father’s happiness, which prioritises others’ feelings above her own. It could be said that in her circumstances, her fear and the implication of her expressing herself may have been detrimental, which inhibited her ability to exercise agency through communicating her views.

Additionally, three respondents attributed some sense of personal agency but were constrained by external factors, which led them to employ others to assist them in achieving their desired goals. Deepika voices how she used her sister (proxy agent) as a *“buffer”* to communicate her needs and feelings:

*“Another thing that really helped me a lot was my younger sister who’s got a very modern on this kind of stuff. She’s like “why would you even go through any of this? She is very she is a bit more rebellious [laughs] then I am and will say what she feels like to my mum and dad. She would back me up at that stage and look “she’s said she doesn’t want to leave her alone“ and she was a very good buffer and she would back me up and so. She will talk to me about it first and she like ok “genuinely how do you feel?” and I would explain to her and then she will go in a battle for me [laugh] and say look “no that’s not right”, “she doesn’t want to that’s the end of that the chapter” and shut it down.”* (Deepika, P18, 522-541)

Deepika’s extract describes her lack of assertiveness towards her parents during discussions around potential partners. She employs her sister’s service as she possesses the attributes to successfully confront her parents, due to her sister’s *“modern”* outlook. Deepika implies that with the younger generation, there is lack of tolerance with

authority. Her sister's "*rebellious*" nature seems to be in contrast to Deepika's compliant self. This appears to be problematic for Deepika as she is unable to fully express her wishes and desires honestly to her parents. This is a result of traditional attitude which suggests not arguing with your parents and therefore she avoids conflict. Subsequently, she is able to be her "*genuine*" self with her sister by expressing her true feelings. In order to gain some control, Deepika uses her sister as a spokesperson as she provides a supportive role. It seems Deepika predicts a "*battle*" with her parents, which signifies a strong resistance and a lack of acceptance of what she has to say. It appears there is some level of her parent's badgering Deepika regarding her decisions as her sister defends her by saying "*she doesn't want to*" and for them to "*leave her alone*". Her sister is able to confidently "*shut it down*" and close the topic effectively, thus successfully gaining agency in an indirect way for Deepika.

#### **4.5.4 Managing the Distress Don't "Rock the Boat" - Compliance & Acceptance**

All the participants described adopting strategies to alleviate internal distress by exhibiting compliance and acceptance of their circumstances. Participants felt their behaviour would be disapproved of if they were to challenge authority or pursue their own desires. All the participants demonstrated some level of self-sacrificing behaviour as a strategy, in order to alleviate tension, emotional distress or conflict with their families to ensure their wellbeing. As Sareena described:

*"Well it would of caused a bit more conflict in the family I guess, my family may not have approved with me just going and doing my own thing in with this person so. So to not rock the boat I just wanted to go along with you know my family's wishes and I didn't want to just cause any conflict so". (Sareena, P26, 757-765)*

Although Sareena would like to do her "*own thing*" she predicts that this may cause conflict as her family may disapprove of her behaviour. Consequently, this may signify her own difficulty with managing the emotions and opinions from her family during the conflict. It could be said that due to the number of people she may have to contend with, this led to Sareena to keep the peace within her family and avoid any conflict. By opting to not "*rock the boat*", this signifies her need to keep the peace by prioritising her family's needs above her own.

Reeya also reported her difficulty with challenging authority:

*“Or didn’t know what questions as I wasn’t you know emotionally mature enough to know what to ask? Is it because it was not accepted to confront the elders saying “I don’t actually want to get married why do you want to marry me off for?”. I don’t know or is there some kind of fear that held you back from asking you just went along with what you thought your parents were doing for you was the right thing”. (Reeya, P72, 2143-2155)*

Reeya tentatively reflects on her difficulty with not expressing herself within the marriage arrangements. Possibly due to her young age, she highlights her naivety of not being “emotionally mature” to know how to express her needs or know what “questions to ask”. A strong cultural belief of not challenging authority may explain why Reeya does not exercise agency and abstain from expressing herself. She seems unsure of her feelings but alludes to the “fear” of confronting her parents which seems to have “held her back”. Ultimately, she rationalises her experience as she trusted that her parents had her best interest and therefore “went along” with it. It may be suggested that by Reeya listing all the things which stopped her from expressing herself at the time, this may describe her helplessness as the only option was to accept her circumstance. There is a sense by her tone of voice of her self-compassion as she’s highlighting the restriction and limited options she had at the time.

Within the narrative, Reeya positions herself in a more passive position as she questions “why do you”. Both Reeya and Prisha below portray themselves as external bystanders due to the lack of involvement and personal connection to their arranged marriage experience:

*“I personally feel I wasn’t as involved as normal people would usually be in an arranged marriage. I kind of just kept my.. I was just like “ok this is happening, it’s done, it’s fine”. It was that.. I I obviously more in involved I chose not too.”. (Prisha, P34, 991-997)*

It seems her behavior is not in line with how she perceives “normal people” would behave; someone who is engaged with the process. Although Prisha does not finish her sentence, there is a sense she kept her views to herself. By her “ok, this is happening”



there is a sense of acceptance of her circumstances as she can't change the decision. She passively expresses *"it's done, it's fine"* but there is a strong sense of passive aggressive behavior as she consciously chose not to get involved, which may be a result of her dissatisfaction towards her situation.

#### 4.5.5 "OMG" - The Unknown

This subtheme is representative of five participants who experienced a limited opportunity and time to fully get to know their potential marriage partner and make informed marriage decisions. Consequently, participants experienced feelings of uncertainty, self doubt and fear of the unknown as they raised concerns of what will happen post marriage. It seems that to make an informed choice, the amount and quality of time is highly significant to the participants.

Prisha's extract offers a succinct understanding of the concerns raised by participants of not fully knowing their potential partner entirely:

*"I was getting married to somebody that I don't know 100% and I will be spending the rest of my life with him. So that... even though arranged marriages is was is quite common in my family and in the wider community. It was still at the back of my head as in oh my goodness, I don't know this person 100% or not even 100 quite a lot as I would have liked to know someone before I was married. As soon as I know I'm going to marry him that is it you know and if I don't like him afterwards or something else comes up afterwards I just got to deal with it, that is it basically". (Prisha: P32, 932-955)*

Prisha's extracts highlights her despondency with not fully knowing her partner "100%". She uses the term *"somebody"* and *"this person"* to describe the relational distance as she portrays him as a stranger. She expresses arranged marriages as being *"quite common"* within her family which seems to be reassuring. However, she still has concerns at the *"back of my head"* as it dawns upon her *"oh my goodness"*, that she hardly knows her partner which is echoed repeatedly within the extract. This seems to cause some emotional conflict as Prisha expressed her desire to get to know her partner in greater depths prior to her marriage. It seems she would gain some comfort with knowing whether they are compatible. As there is a strong sense of permanence with

marriage, it seems as if this is creating some worries in the form of what “if” she doesn’t like her partner. The thought at the possibility of having to spend the “*rest of my life*” with someone she may not like seems fatalistic. Thus, implying the importance of her decision as it could have a detrimental impact on the duration of her life. As she continues, she takes a passive stance by her expression “*got to deal with it*”. This signifies the lack of flexibility with marriage decisions once they have been made.

Like Prisha, Zara also demonstrates her intolerance to uncertainty as she raises concern of post marriage:

*“Yeah not knowing, so you sort of think is it going to work? Is it not going to work and what are your in-laws going to be like? What is he going to be like you know because even though you I met him you didn’t get that chance to really get to know them because there is always other people around so it wasn’t like... well I didn’t get to know him sort of really fully I don’t think until afterwards I got married.” (Zara: P10, 246-269)*

Zara’s narrative describes her internal dialogue of questions which describes her worries. There is a strong sense of anxiety and the need for more certainty regarding her post-marriage experience. It seems her main concern is “*not knowing*” whether her marriage is “*going to work*” as she repeats this twice. The lack of time and privacy given were considered by Zara as main contributor to not getting quality space to find out enough information about her potential partner, in order to alleviate her own worries. This may be due to the explanation provided within the subtheme “Urgency to Save Face” which suggests disapproval of individuals of the opposite sex spending time together privately. She suggests at the time of marriage her partner was unknown and asserts that the getting to know process take places post marriage.

Furthermore, Sareena continues to voice the common theme of “*more time*” required:

*“It requires a bit more time invested in it and you know it’s not something that can be just decided overnight whether you’re compatible with someone it takes more time than that”. (Sareena, P7, 188-193)*

Sareena conveys there is an expectation for a decision to be made “*overnight*” which she implies as unrealistic. She use the terms “*invested*” to signify there is positive implication to having the time to get to know someone. Within the culture it could be said there is a lack of emphasis on the emotional connection in the form of compatibility. It seems there is a mismatch in values as Sareena believes the depths of a person and the emotional connection is fundamental. Considering a prerequisite to making a choice requires relative amount of time to make an informed decision, Sareena implies she was denied the right to really assess her choice and make a strong informed decision.

#### **4.6 MASTER THEME FOUR: SELF AND IDENTITY**

##### **4.6.1 Overview**

This master theme explores the participants’ self and identity and the internal conflicts and negotiations they experienced during the arranged marriage process. The subtheme ““Done Deal” - Objectified Self” illuminates participants’ strong disconnection with the process and feelings of objectification. As a result, participants were perceived as assets as their worth is dependent on what they could offer which consequently disregarded their feelings within the process. To follow, the next subtheme “Internal Identity Conflict - You Before Me” highlights the internal identity conflict the participants experienced as they emphasised the collective and cultural identity, versus their own individuality. Lastly, the subtheme “Pushing Gender Boundaries” describes how the participants are pushing against their identity as women, by challenging the stereotypical roles of being housewives. As a result, women are changing their attitudes and opting for different decisions to strive for more independence and allowing their children to cohabitate.

##### **4.6.2 “Done Deal” - Objectified Self**

This subtheme captures five participants’ experiences of feeling objectified within the process of their marriage arrangements. The term “*done deal*” describes the arranged marriage experience as being in the form of a business transaction amongst families. As a result, the participants give a strong sense of feeling dehumanised and objectified, as families would focus on facts on paper or physical attributes, and disregard the individuals’ needs, emotions or their personality. Participants had the experience of

being considered for their monetary value, rather than individuals who have unique traits that may be of value. The participants voiced their need to be included within the process and for their feelings to be acknowledged.

Sonia's extract describes her feelings towards posing for a picture, which seems to be part of traditional practice:

*"It was the first time I'm experiencing anything like that.. and I didn't like it. I said why do I have to wear a sari and pose for a picture and send it to the guy for him to judge?"* (Sonia, P10, 271-276)

Sonia seems strongly dissatisfied as she expresses *"I didn't like it"* with adhering to cultural traditions for the first time. Although a sari is a representation of cultural wear, it seems she felt pressured to wear one. The sari feels incongruent with her identity and thus, minimising her other attributes which makes her feel like a person. Subsequently, feelings of discontentment and incongruence may have led her to question the status quo by asking *"why"*, as a way of questioning the rationale for these practices. It seems posing for a picture for a male to evaluate her on her physical appearance, causes some emotional distress. Her frustrated tone may be an indication of her feeling vulnerable as a male is in a position of power to judge her.

Additionally, a few participants echoed the lack of acknowledgement of their needs and feelings within the process. As expressed by Aisha below:

*"It was very much it was it felt to me very much like a business transaction between two families. That's how it felt very much I think my husband's needs and my needs even in the equation, they weren't, they was just really two people coming together to get married and that's it".* (Aisha, P42, 1232-1240)

Aisha seems to be articulating the fundamental importance of *"just"* coming together for the purpose of marriage and *"that's it"* with nothing more taken into account. Aisha conveys feelings of disconnection within the process by describing it as a *"business transaction"* between two families. She uses other words such as *"it"* and *"equation"* to describe the process. As discussed in the earlier themes, women represent the family honour, positive qualities of the family and their purity, may explain why the experience feels like an exchange of goods. Fundamentally, she later expressed their *"needs"* are

ignored which may describe feeling like a bystander within the process. It seems as if Aisha felt that they should have the right to be involved and acknowledged within the marriage arrangements.

Similarly, Sareena describes her feeling objectified in another way:

*“So they kind of look at what’s on the paper and then if it matches then it’s like it kind of like a done deal but you have to consider like the person who’s getting married and their kind of feelings and how the actual bride and groom would feel towards each other”.* (Sareena, P5, 135-149)

Sareena’s narrative above suggests “*they*” her family, seems to minimise a person’s attributes by looking at piece of paper and then deciding their compatibility based on the facts. By her expression of “*done deal*”, this suggests the marriage experience is in the form of a deal. She explains that the process should be more than “*what’s on the paper*”, she emphasises the need for those getting married to be understood with particular attention to their “*feelings*”. It seems she would like more focus to be on the bride and groom’s relationship and their feelings toward each other, rather than based on superficial facts about the individuals.

#### **4.6.3 Internal Identity Conflict: You Before Me**

This subtheme describes how five participants felt the need to put others’ desires before their own within the decision-making process. Subsequently, the importance of family and their wellbeing, culture and religion were highly meaningful factors for the participants. The participants describe the tension of their Asian identity which values collectivism in relation to their own individuality. Consequently, two participants expressed how their restrictive environments did not allow their individuality to flourish. This meant stagnation in their personal development and their lack of self-awareness which contributed to feeling inhuman.

Aisha’s narrative below defines strongly the collectivist nature of her identity:

*“So something about your identity you know like Asians identities there is no individuals. It’s not you or me, it’s us. So I guess what I quite adapted to when I was young as I grew older you know I had a*

*sense of me.. I guess I wasn't as happy with the status quo then you know. But here I am ...*" (Aisha, P25, 732-741)

Aisha proceeds to describe her experience with her identity changing over a period of time, thus suggesting it is not fixed due to culture but rather influenced by context. The Asian identity has a strong relational sense of togetherness which is inclusive of all and represented by her term "us". She explains "adapting" to the Asian identity from a young age, however as she grew older there is a strong sense that she started to develop her individuality and have a more connected sense of self as she expresses "me". With hindsight, she expressed not feeling "happy" with adopting this collective identity in the past. However her powerful expression "But here I am.." suggests a strong sense of helplessness, as her Asian identity still overshadows and forms a part of her identity presently. Although she is more self-aware, there is still a strong collective identity which seems to make it difficult for her to challenge the status quo.

Additionally, two participants demonstrate how their collective identity encourages decisions to be made to ensure the wellbeing of others. This is exemplified within Prisha's extract:

*"My marriage was a lot to do with the family being happy especially my gran who was very old and it was one of her wishes to see me get married. I knew it was there but just so soon. She got more unwell and so things were speeded up up the process of finding someone and getting me married as soon as I finished Uni just so because that was one of my grandma's wishes. I wasn't 100% happy because obviously I didn't when you're younger you don't really understand things at that time and you think I'm only 20 21 and I don't want to get married so early.. But um.. So it was a yes and a no from me"* (Prisha, P22, 647-661)

From Prisha's extract it seems elders are highly respected as Prisha and her family prioritise their grandmother's wishes. As a result of her grandmother's health deteriorating, Prisha experienced the process of her marriage being "speeded up". Although Prisha had awareness of her marriage, it seems "just so soon" which may describe her lack of readiness. She continues to repeatedly quantify the pace of her experience as she references "up up" which may suggest her difficulty with how abrupt

it felt. Upon further inspection she expresses not being “100% happy” with her circumstances, she rationalises it to her immaturity and not really “understanding things”, possibly due to her age. Her ambivalence described as “yes and a no” which implies her feeling torn between wanting to adhere to her grandmother’s wishes against feeling that her marriage was too early.

Reeya and another participant illustrate the implication of being “led” and “controlled” by others can have a detrimental impact on their personal development. As described below:

*“I think around mid 20s before I actually came up and realised actually there is life out there and that’s when my personality developed a bit more I was a bit more aware of myself as an individual as a human being. Before that it was very much led by others and controlled by others and you just went along with the flow whether you liked it or not you didn’t have a say in it basically you know”.* (Reeya, P54, 1598-1608)

Reeya describes a delay in her personality development as result of being suppressed by others. Due to her environmental context changing, Reeya breathed a new life as she “came up” and realised “there is life out there”. It seems that having the reflective space and lack of authoritarian environment, led her to become more self-aware and experience her own individuality and humanness. In her circumstances, feeling like a “human being” is perceived as having a sense of self, feeling connected to others but also aware of her unique qualities. It seems she has a better understanding of who she is and is more in touch with her emotions. It appears prior to this experience, her compliant nature of going “along” and suppressing her emotions whether she “liked it or not” may have contributed to her lack of development. Developing a sense of autonomy by being given the opportunity to make her own decisions may not have been given, due to her restricting environment when she was younger.

#### **4.6.4 Pushing Gender Boundaries**

Within this subtheme, all the participants were striving towards more independence as women by pushing boundaries in order to gain some sense of control, choices, rights and freedom. Six participants voiced their wish to push women, identities beyond the

roles of being a domesticated subservient wife and mother. Four participants expressed their aspirations of attaining a career, further education, financial stability and control over their lives prior to marriage. Three participants who have children became more flexible with the next generation, due their own experiences. This is vocalised below by Aisha:

*“That scares my family that sort of you know they really do not approve of this kind of living without getting married together. So I think women who are much more open like me is a threat to them and their way of life and what they believe is the right way of life. To keep our cultures you know” (Aisha, P43, 1282-1290)*

Aisha’s narrative suggests marriage is an integral part of the Asian culture. She expresses that her own openness and flexible views on cohabitation seems to “scare” her family. Women like Aisha, who do not conform and show resistance to traditional marriage views receive “disapproval” and are perceived as a threat to the Asian “way of life”. This demonstrates very black or white thinking whereby their way of life is “right” and others are wrong. Aisha adopts a different way of thinking due to her personal experience, however there is a lack of understanding and rigidity in thinking within the community due to fear of change and women disrespecting the culture. Seemingly, from the subtheme “No Option for Singlehood” and “Urgency to Save Face”, this may explain the strong views on cohabitation as this practice goes against cultural and religious beliefs, thus challenging traditional, cultural and gendered identity.

Alternatively, others pushed boundaries by making a decision based upon their desired role and identity as women, as exemplified by Zara:

*“If I had married him I wouldn’t have been able to work, I would of been tied to the kitchen like for the rest of my life [laugh]. Basically and that expectation was there and I said “no I don’t love you enough to, you know to do that to my life”. (Zara, P20, 591-599)*

Zara’s narrative powerfully captures the perceived identity and role of women, which is solely to be housewives that are “tied to the kitchen”. This notion describes restrictive practices for women that sound fatalistic as there is no other option or flexibility to do



any other roles such as working. Zara was able to reflect on her feelings and priorities what was meaningful to her. It seems that the love she had for this individual was not enough for her to sacrifice her desire to work and would feel punishing as she describes *“to do that to my life”*. It could be said that her refusal of the proposal seems to be a rejection of this identity, a rejection of domesticated chores over an opportunity to pursue independence and financial stability.

Alternatively, Sonia had a slightly different experience, whereby she was able to negotiate both her identity as a women and her culture:

*“I graduated came out and my parents asked me if I want to continue to study and I said I want too but I want to get a job first and save up and then do a masters. But.. yeah they weren’t buying that [laughs] so they said ok now and then I got a job and I was working. So they said now you’re working get married and do your masters later on”.*

(Sonia, P4, 92-106)

Upon completion of her degree, Sonia was *“asked”* by her parents what her aspirations were, which signified curiosity and a collaborative relationship. She frequently expressed her *“wants”* which indicated her ability to express her needs and desires. However by her amusement, it seems she was trying to push the boundaries further than she knew they would have approved off. Although she found employment, there was a lack of willingness by her parents to wait until she had completed her master’s degree. Subsequently, delaying marriage may raise concerns for her parents, but also challenge beliefs on how she should behave as an Asian daughter. As a compromise, they waited until she gained employment but asserted the boundaries regarding her masters. This demonstrates that identity can be negotiated with two working interactions; as they work through the tension and the desires of both sides.

#### **4.7 Summary of Data Analysis**

This chapter provides an in depth account of South Asian women’s pre-marital experience of their arranged marriage and their experience of choice. The first master theme ‘Cultural and Religious Belief Systems as Influencers’ describes the beliefs systems that forms the boundaries or rules in which women within this culture have to

abide too. Rules such as no sex before marriage and no option for singlehood shape and influence the choices and decisions to have an arranged marriage. There is a strong responsibility placed on women to uphold the family honour and to behave appropriately in order to protect their own and their families reputation. As a result, participants felt need to have an early marriage however some felt not ready for marriage. Those that delayed marriage experienced negative consequences to their identity within the community.

The second master theme ‘the ripple of pressure’ illustrates the participants’ experience of pressure in various forms (duty, time, cultural, family etc). The pressure is to ensure everybody adheres to their cultural or parental duties such as enforce marriage responsibilities, adhere to religious and cultural beliefs and for women to acknowledge their gender responsibilities. Pressure was experienced in a subtle form via indirect and direct communication whereby scaremongering and anxiety inducing tactics were used.

The third master theme ‘Decision Making: Choice and Agency’ demonstrates how the decision making experience created a great deal of anxiety for the participants, due to the uncertainty of not knowing their partner in depth and time pressure to make an decision. The experience of choice is key within the decision making process, those who felt they had a choice felt heard, understood, were able to express themselves, had acceptance of their decision and a shift of power by given the responsibility to make important life decisions. Even though participants’ are constrained by cultural and religious boundaries, they exercised agency by loosening the boundaries using others to communicate their needs or by communicating their needs directly to their parents. In some cases, there was no ability to exercise agency and those participants’ did not feel they had a choice within the arranged marriage process. As the decision making process can be highly emotive as highlighted, the participants’ described two strategies

compliant behaviour and acceptance as means of alleviating internal distress. Some accepted their circumstances and their lack of agency as the needs of others satisfied their own wellbeing.

The last master theme is 'Self and Identity' which described the participants' feeling objectified and disconnected with the process as their needs and feelings were not taken into account. As participants' were exposed to western values, some participants' experienced an internal conflict. This theme demonstrated how participants negotiated with the internal conflict of a collectivist vs. individualist identity. Some experienced having to sacrifice their individuality, freedom, wishes and needs for others' happiness which consequently came at price (early marriage, delayed personality development, career development and education delays). Lastly, the accounts illustrated that women are pushing their gendered identity through their actions by becoming more educated, independent and with some of their own experiences influencing their actions. Thus, they exhibited more flexibility with the next generation. Overall, the results highlight the strong relational aspect to the arranged marriage pre-marital experience with many inter-woven factors that influence and define an individual's experience which is highly complicated and subjective.

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a summary of research findings, followed by a discussion that will aim to address the research questions, in conjunction with existing literature and theory. Critical evaluations of the methodological issues are considered, to ensure strong qualitative practice. Further reflections on the implications to the wider context, the field of Counselling Psychology, and clinical practice will be explored. Lastly, limitations within this study will warrant further recommendations for future research.

## 5.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Within the narratives, the themes that have emerged are: cultural and religious beliefs systems as influencers, the ripple of pressure, decision-making: negotiation of agency and choice, and self and identity. Participants' anchored their experience within cultural and religious boundaries that influenced or determined their behaviour. Marriage was deemed the only option; as women's choices were influenced by the beliefs, you have to marry and no intimate relationships prior to marriage are allowed. Participants' experienced a strong sense of urgency from others to have an early marriage, as it was considered a safe partnership from unaccepted behaviour (intimacy) and feelings of shame. Subsequently, participants have a responsibility to protect the family honour and their reputation by marrying. However, this conflicted with their readiness for marriage

as some participants had other desires, such as education and/or a career. The implications of marriage delays were found to affect participants' self worth as their deviant behaviour from traditional norms came under scrutiny.

The second master theme, "The ripple of pressure", illustrates that all the participants' experienced pressure in various forms (duty, time, cultural, family, etc). The pressure is to ensure everybody adheres to their duties, such as marriage responsibilities, follow religious and cultural beliefs, and for women to continue the family lineage. The theme also uncovers the subtleties of pressure experienced through indirect and direct communication, whereby scaremongering tactic created fear and anxiety to encourage individual's decisions. Participants adopted strategies to alleviate their psychological distress by reconsidering their marriage decisions.

There were a range of experiences within the decision-making process, from no choice to some partner choice. Participants that attained some choice felt a sense of empowerment, independence, maturity, and a sense of self worth. Depending on how strict they perceived their parents, participants used their resources by hiring proxy agents, whilst others negotiated with their parents. In both circumstances, the agent is aiming to increase their freedom to choose in order to meet their own needs, and for both to have aligned goals. The feeling of uncertainty throughout the process was predominating, as participants felt the time to get to know their partner was very limited. As a way of coping with emotional distress, participants adopted a complying and accepting strategy to avoid conflict or receiving disapproval by family members.

Participants described feeling objectified and disconnected due to a lack of involvement within the marriage process. Some participants felt their self identity did not flourish due to lack of acknowledgement of their individual needs, as a result of prioritising the needs of others. Later on, participants were able to gain self awareness and self growth through changing their environmental context. When the South Asian women had an opportunity to exercise agency and control, decisions were either negotiated or made to push their gender identity beyond the conventional image of housewives and mothers, to reflect their own individual desires or beliefs, for themselves or their children.

### **5.3 DISCUSSION OF MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS**

***“What were South Asian women’s premarital experiences of their arranged marriages?”***

**5.3.1 Discussion of Master Theme One: Cultural and Religious Belief Systems as Influencers**

Within this study, cultural and religious beliefs were highly influential and internalised; these notions appear to formulate a cultural and religious framework, which clearly sets the boundaries (4.3.2 Subtheme: ‘No Option for Singlehood’ & 4.3.3 Subtheme: ‘The Urgency to Save Face’) for South Asian women. Marriage was not only to expand the family lineage but also is perceived as a safe partnership of legitimate behaviours. Subsequently, for those reasons, South Asian women within this study experienced a strong sense of urgency to get married. Similarly, research by Zaidi and Shuraydi (2002), found protecting young women, family honour, compliance of religious precepts and marriage norms were precipitating factors to justify an arranged marriage. Internal conflicts arose as participants questioned their own readiness to marry (wanting to “*enjoy life*”) versus the expectation to marry. Unwillingness to comply with traditional practices was found to have consequential implications on the participants’ psychological wellbeing, as they were concerned with how they were perceived within the community.

Furthermore, participants within this study who delayed their marriage further than the acceptable marital age, experienced feelings of inferiority and being different. Muslim women also felt pressure to marry due to the fear of feeling alienated, as highlighted by Ali, Liu and Humendian (2004). Similarly, the researcher attending an Asian woman’s group found the first words vocalised by a member of the group were “*Are you married?*”. This left the researcher with feelings of shame for not being married at her age (see Appendix 14). The researcher’s experience mimicked the shame experienced by the family as a result of their unmarried daughter in Rathor’s (2011) study. Subsequently, the fear of rejection or feeling different from the collective community may encourage South Asian women to embark on marriage regardless of their readiness.

Many scholars and researchers have evidenced within research that upholding the family honour is primarily fundamental for avoiding shame and disrespect to those

within the South Asian community (Bhardwaj, 2001; Chantler, Gangoli & Hester, 2009; Samad & Eade, 2003). The women within this study reported premarital sexual and intimate relationships are forbidden as it would bring shame upon the family. Engaging in a relationship (dating, meeting) presumably may spark some level of intimate behaviour with those of the opposite sex. As saving their reputation is of central focus, families take the responsibility to preserve women's virginity by managing in subordinate behaviour through restrictive practices (i.e. not allowing meeting a boy privately) (Ahmad et al., 2005; An-Na'im & Candler, 2000). A study of Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents in Bradford and East London, found children were pressured to marry in haste in order to "save" them from forming intimate relationships with others (Samad & Eade, 2003; Werbner, 2005, p. 903). Parents' fears seem to drive their behaviour, as they are concerned with whether women will ruin the family name by engaging with intimate relations prior to marriage. Fundamentally, this may explain why the women within this study experienced a sense of urgency to get married, as it serves as a protective measure. The women had a strong sense of their own responsibility and duty to their culture, religion, community and family, as they are aware of the consequences if they do not conform.

Interestingly, within this study, women hold a vast amount of power as they represent the family honour, but paradoxically experience feelings of powerlessness as they are confined by restrictive practices in comparison to men. Consequently, there is a strong gender inequality as women feel they are not given the permission or the right to do or be as they desire ("*boys are boys*" and "*girls just...*"). This supports the notion that women are socialised to develop an interdependent self to prioritise their selves to match others, as the possibility of deviant behaviour is too threatening to the family honour, whereas males are encouraged to develop an independent self whereby all their behaviours are condoned (Inman et al., 2001).

### **5.3.2 Discussion of Master Theme Two: The Ripple of Pressure**

The arranged marriage definition proposed by the British Home Office fails to acknowledge the experience of pressure within the arranged marriage practice (Forced Marriage Unit [FMU], 2017). It is clearly evidenced that South Asian women within this study experienced pressure in subtle forms during their premarital arrangements. Interestingly, this research revealed a range of pressures, including social, cultural,

family, peer, emotional, psychological, gender, and time pressures. Such pressures are exerted to ensure certain decisions are made in accordance to the religious and cultural beliefs (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Peterson et al., 2011). To best understand the concept of pressure, research usefully utilised heuristic tools to unravel discussion surrounding pressure. It takes an objective stance, which removes the personal connection from their experiences. This study, however, attends to this methodological limitation by researching the lived experience. Nevertheless, Hester's et al. (2007) study using a vignette, found that emotional pressure could play a role in pressuring someone to marry, which was also found in Gangoli's et al. (2006) research. Another form of emotional pressure was the need to make their mothers happy and to alleviate their anxieties (Hester et al., 2007). As the experience of pressure is largely based on participants' own definition of pressure, women may not realise the increase in pressure if their point of reference of pressure is associated with physical force. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the participants recognised their experience as pressurised. Whether the participants label their experience as a form of coercion or duress is subjective; therefore, the subtleties of pressure in comparison to the more obvious physical pressure is still of value, as it was found to cause some psychological distress.

The experience of pressure was found to have a rippling effect as the community feels pressure to abide by cultural and religious rules and duties (4.4.2 Subtheme: 'Pressure to Adhere to Duties'), which in turn puts pressure on parents, who then puts pressure of their children. This study also supported Samad and Eade's study (2003), which identified parents' experience of pressure from the wider community to acknowledge their own responsibility as parents, and to ensure their children get married. As identified within this study, reputation is of high concern within the South Asian community. Subsequently, parents may experience their own internal distress, which leads them to adopt a coping strategy such as displacement, whereby they transfer vulnerable feelings onto their children. As parents are unable to express their feelings towards the community, by the process of marriage talks, the distress and feelings are then transferred onto the participants. Subsequently, participants feel the pressure, and feelings of anxiety, fear, frustration, and ambivalence towards their marriage.

In general, studies fail to acknowledge how subtle pressure is exerted onto South Asian women. Crucially, this study found pressure was induced through constant marriage talk (4.4.3 Subtheme: 'The Relentless Marriage Talks'), whereby social expectations are



consistently conveyed to some of the participants. Similarly, within research by Gangoli et al. (2006, p. 10), a participant echoed how expectations were “*drummed*” into her. In relation, a theme called ‘Bringing it up: Coercion, threat and negative emotions’ was revealed when an IPA research was conducted on self-identified homosexual males entering into an arranged marriage, as highlighted in Jaspal’s (2014) study. Participants reported that they were reminded of the importance of heterosexual marriage and their religious and cultural obligations. This consequently had a negative impact, as the constant reminder threatened their sexual identity and elicited feelings of embarrassment, shame, and disgust. Furthermore, the current research found parents would induce fear by using “*scaremongering*” tactics. Two participants were reminded by their parents of the possibility of loneliness and not finding a partner, which advertently affected their self worth. Ultimately, these messages were internalised, and left the participants questioning their marriage decisions.

Furthermore, this research found that, for South Asian women, there are strong gender expectations to adhere to their duties as women (i.e. wives and motherhood). Therefore, time pressure is experienced, whether it is to marry by a certain age or to make their decision within a certain time frame. The urgency was to ensure women engaged in their gender specific roles at the appropriate age. As found in Bendriss’ (2008) research, parents were discouraging young women from pursuing a career or further education, to ensure they prioritise marriage. Although in Bhopal’s (2011) research, parents were entirely complicit in wanting their daughters to attend and succeed at university. They were equally complicit in wanting their daughters to enter into well paid, high-status jobs in the labour market that guaranteed their daughters financial independence. The reasons for wanting such goals for their daughters are a desire to ensure a degree of stability and future affluence in the lives of their children. Three women within this study felt a need to have children young as delaying their marriage may result in infertility. This reinforced their gender identity as child-bearers and nurturers. In some sense, these concerns are supported by the medical community that suggests infertility does increase with age (Dunson, Baird & Colombo, 2004). These beliefs can drive the family to encourage early marriage to ensure fertility.

The rationale for marriage in western cultures are predominately for positive reasons such as to increase health and financial situation, a way of displaying love and commitment, increase feelings of safety and wellbeing (Waite, & Gallagher, 2002;

Stutzer, & Frey, 2006). In contrast, many of the reasons given by the South Asian women within this study were to avoid the negative of infertility, shame, damaging family or personal honour and being perceived as the “*leftovers*” within the community. It could be suggested that South Asian women value how they are portrayed within their community and therefore decisions are made to engage in avoidance of such negative self-perceptions and associated feelings. These outweigh the insular views that focus more on the relational and positive feelings associated with marriage.

### **5.3.3 Discussion of Master Theme Four: Self and Identity**

This research uniquely found participants felt objectified within the arrangement experience, as their voices, and attributes such as their personality, desires, emotions, and needs were highly disregarded (4.6.2 Subtheme: “Done Deal” - Objectified Self). Participants revealed feeling as though they were of monetary value by the use of terms such as “*business transaction*” and “*done deal*”, consequently feeling dehumanised and disconnected within the arrangement process. This could be linked to the dowry tradition, whereby women were perceived as inferior and as property (Bhopal, 1997; Rathor, 2011). Although dowry practice has been abolished in some communities, the attitudes towards South Asian women’s self worth may still be present today.

The objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 174) may further help to unfold some of the participants’ experiences. Feeling objectified is described as being treated as just a body for its function and for others. Although the theory is geared towards sexual objectification, it can be proposed within this cultural context. The theory proposed that feeling objectified is only problematic when these views are internalised. Furthermore, those that internalise the observer perspective into their sense of self could adopt this perspective; this could be represented by a few participants acting as bystanders within their own marriage arrangements. Subsequently, as this culture perceives women as inferior and as objects, this may induce feelings of powerlessness as women feel they are unable to achieve their goals or gain control over important life decisions such as marriage. Fundamentally, some participants challenged these values by voicing their rights for more involvement within the marriage arrangements; this may in turn increase connectivity with the process, and eliminate feelings of being objectified by others.

Literature highlights collectivist cultures such as the South Asian community place significance on the prioritisation of others' needs before the self (4.6.3 Subtheme: 'Internal Identity Conflict - You Before Me'). As consistently found within this research, women felt a strong obligation towards their cultural group and family, similar to findings by Hui and Tnandis (1986) and Cross et al. (2003). In line with Sedikides and Brewer (2015), the representation of self, the relational and collective selves seemed more meaningful as participants described that their decisions were made with their family's wellbeing in mind, in order to preserve the family's happiness and avoid conflict. However, some participants described the tension arising between their individual self and the collective self as they wished to pursue their own desires, to delay their marriage, engage in further education, or get to know their partners. As found, many negotiated this tension (individuality vs. collectivist) by displaying self sacrificing and conforming behaviour to alleviate distress and to coincide with the in-group values, may suggest this is more meaningful for them. Participants also described feeling torn between western values and their parents' belief systems, as highlighted in Zaidi and Shuraydi's (2002) qualitative study. However, this research goes a step further, as findings were based on the lived experiences rather than perceptions of the arranged marriage experience.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the literature by adding the psychological implications of South Asian women repressing their sense of self, and subjugating their individuality and needs for others. This significantly leads to the delay of women developing their sense of self and personality. Others experienced a sense of helplessness as they were unable to challenge or break away from authoritative restrictions until their environmental context changed. Erikson's Psychosocial Model (1968) provides a theory to suggest the formation of identity is dependent on the freedom and sanctioning of behaviour (Eysenck, 1998). In Reeya's case, her being "*controlled*" and "*led*" by people may have limited her ability to develop self-awareness and recognise her own capabilities through decision-making (Roland, 1988, p. 330). Evidently, she recalled when she "*came up*" and felt more human, as she was able to explore her environment, develop autonomy, a sense of self, and her personality, as she had more control over her life.

This research found that some women were actively negotiating and developing a new gendered identity (4.6.4 Subtheme: 'Pushing Gender Boundaries'), as they redefined

their role through their aspirations (career/education) or roles (non housewife) in Britain. In line with Mohee's (2012) qualitative study, interviews with 30 British women were found to push their gender identity beyond the roles attributed to them. Subsequently, this may signify the need for independence, control, and financial stability. Although these are retrospective accounts, women were able to generate new gender identities for the next generation, through reflection of own experiences and distancing from cultural traditions. For instance, one participant, who was a mother, was allowing her children to cohabitate. In other circumstances, women were able to negotiate and collaboratively discuss with their family their future desires. One participant was able to negotiate her identity, whereby her family compromised with her having a job, but further education would be only attained post-marriage. This challenges the stereotypical western view of South Asian women being passive and emancipated (Burman & Chantler, 2003). Although it seems a triumph for women to push their gender boundaries, there is, nevertheless, an implication with deviating from the cultural norm which may restrict pushing boundaries (Bhopal, 1999). Aisha described disapproval is received by the community, as these women are perceived as a *"threat"* to the culture. Overall, the women made decisions that align mainly with cultural traditions and gender identities, but for some women, where permissible, they were able to pursue and allow the individual aspect of their identities to flourish. This demonstrates fluidity in identity of women as they attempt to reconstruct new identities for themselves.

The following section will aim to answer the second research question:

***"How did South Asian women experience choice within the decision-making process?"***

#### **5.3.4 Master Theme Three: Decision-making: Negotiation of Agency & Choice**

According to the 4.5.2 Subtheme 'The Experience of Choice', South Asian women all described how important having a choice is within the decision-making process. The majority of South Asian women experienced a lack of choice and agency in the terms of marriage choice (4.3.2 Subtheme: 'No Option for Singlehood'). What emerged from the narrative is that life is predetermined (*"map of my life"*) for South Asian women, whereby their lives are inherently planned out, which suggests a lack of choice and agency. This research found that the premarital experience possesses two opportunities

for decision-making: the decision to marry, and then, more specifically, choice in partner. The arranged marriage definitions tend to amalgamate both decision-making experiences, which could be perceived as problematic, as the participants within this study did not have a marriage choice, but the majority experienced a choice in partner.

Well-documented within literature, family involvement is of great significance during the decision-making process (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Apostolou, 2007; Modood, Beishon & Virdee, 1994). There is a strong preservation of cultural identity in relation to the modification of traditional arranged marriages but also the recognition by families that some change was inevitable allowing women greater say in whom they would marry (Bhopal, 2011). It is exhibited that the family initially hold the power within the decision-making process, but tension arises when the experience is not collaborative. The right amount of choice can enable individuals to feel autonomy and liberation (Schwartz & Ward, 2004). Similarly, two participants revealed they felt a sense of control, independence and empowerment, through having some choice and being given the opportunity to be involved in a major life decision. However, one participant experienced no opportunity to express herself within the decision-making process, which elicited feelings of sadness. This corroborates Swartz and Ward's (2004, p. 87) proposal, that choice serves as an "expressive value". It could be said that participants being consulted and "*given*" a choice gives the individual an indirect permission to freely express themselves, which impacts their sense of agency, as individuals feel they could change, discuss, or negotiate their decisions. Conversely, this is externally granted and dependent on how boundaried and collaborative the families are. Subsequently, it also shifts the power dynamic and control onto the decision maker, which was found within this study. Fundamentally, for the participants who had experienced a choice, this demonstrated reciprocated care, whereby the individuals' feelings and wellbeing mattered to the family. Importantly, this research found a simple "yes" or "no" has a large bearing on individual lives, due to the permanence of the decision once it has been made. It was found once the individual consented to the marriage it can instantaneously "*seal the deal*". This implies that decisions are permanent, which can have a vast bearing on the participants as the decisions were perceived as life changing, with no options to reverse it later on.

This research found South Asian women are often mediating between strong paradoxes whereby they experience feelings of powerlessness vs. powerful and no choice vs. some

choice. The women were exposed to various forms of pressure and restrictions which identified some form of helplessness as a result of limited options within the process. They also experienced limited or no choice to express when they would like to marry. Simultaneously, they were given large amounts of power as they represent the family honour. Therefore, their behaviour is not only highly important but is often scrutinized by family members to ensure the family honour is upheld. Women have the power to ruin the family name and therefore the control is taken away from women through limiting their choices. As some women remain in the state of powerlessness, others take the opportunity to negotiate, to gain more choice and obtain some control. These paradoxes may identify the unconscious/conscious contradictions that present between families and the individual. As a result, this creates a great deal of dissonance. As the arrangement process proceeds, South Asian women's narrative highlights some level of partner choice. Concurrently, they are also exposed to various external pressures, whilst deciding their options. Even though they have limited choices, there is a strong appreciation for being given some choice, as there is a strong awareness of some people not being given that option. By their language within the narrative, there is a real approval of having some choice within the arrangement process. As they were allowed to make their own decisions, there was a strong sense of empowerment and self worth as they take responsibility of their own lives.

In line with the Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957), the South Asian women within this study often articulated being in a state of dissonance. Their internal beliefs were frequently inconsistent and conflicting with their families' views. For instance, timing of their marriage, seeking independence, getting to know their potential partner, involvement in the decision making, attaining higher education and community perceptions of the family were often issues that created dissonance. In some cases, participants tried alleviate conflicting beliefs by increasing their personal agency to align their parent's beliefs with their own. However, this was not always achievable due to inability to exercise personal agency due to participants' concern over parent's wellbeing or parents' holding fixed beliefs and therefore a few participants remained in a state of dissonance. Subsequently, participants were orientated towards reducing their dissonance, and alleviating feelings of shame, anger, sadness and uncertainty by changing their decisions, choices and behaviours. As evidenced, the participants often

engaged in self sacrificing, compliance and accepting behaviours as coping strategies, to align their beliefs that were more consistent with their families' views.

Within a collectivist culture, individuals are expected to adjust their beliefs and values to align with others (Kitayama et al., 2004). Choice was experienced as interdependent within this study, and other findings were similar in cross-cultural research (Schwartz et al., 2006; Stephens et al., 2007). Therefore, the meaning of choice challenges the western construct of choice, whereby the individual makes choice for their own purpose. Indeed, some participants made their choice depending on their parents' wellbeing. Seeing their family in a positive affective state led some participants to not reconsider their marriage decision, even though they weren't fully happy with it. All the respondents in marriage research by Gangoli et al. (2006) felt that it was important their parents were happy. Within this study, some participants were given a choice, but, ultimately, their choice is dependent on their parents' approval and acceptance of their choices. Mohee (2012) suggested that individuals agree to parents' choice in order to gain their family's trust. Therefore, there is a degree of choice within an arranged marriage; however, there are conditions to their choice, as it is dependent on the wellbeing and approval of others. According to Allendorf (2013), this may not be problematic as South Asian wishes to preserve the inter-generational relationships which can have a positive outcome post marriage.

South Asian women within the decision-making process experienced a considerable amount of uncertainty as a result of time pressure. Participants described limited choice with the amount of time given to get to know their partner prior to marriage (4.5.5 Subtheme: "'OMG' - The Unknown'). On the contrary, as a research on British Indian married couples highlighted the majority of young people claimed they knew their partner "very well" prior to marriage (Goodwin & Cramer, 2000).

Nevertheless, individuals ran the risk of "groupthink" whereby fundamental errors in decision-making are possible due to not enough time provided to consider their choices (Rose, 2011). Consequently, participants described a sense of fear and anxiety due to the unknown, as there was a strong desire to get to know their partner prior to marriage agreements. One participant felt there was not enough time "*invested*" within the process and another reported a lack of privacy, whereas another participant felt 4 months was an adequate amount of time to make a decision. It could be suggested,

parents may not want the “getting to know” period to be substantially long, due to the strong belief and fear of intimate relationships forming. As a form of restrictive boundaries, parents may limit the number of meetings to avoid their family name from being tarnished. Gray (1999), Lemerise and Arsenio (2000) and Shafir, Simonson and Tversky (1993) suggest when there are highly negative emotions such as uncertainty, conflict, and stress, the individuals opt for short term benefits when making a decision, even though there may be long term costs. It could be seen that the majority seem to demonstrate high levels of risk-taking to alleviate distress, as they make a decision based on little information known about their potential partner.

Although parents play a strong role in finding a ‘good match’ to ensure their children’s happiness (Charsley & Shaw, 2006), there is a mismatch between parents and their children in what is perceived as a compatible partnership. In this study, the South Asian women valued the emotional connection and understanding the depth of a person. However, parents do not seem to value or understand the importance of an interpersonal connection, which in turn provides a rationale for limited time given during the decision-making process. Similarly, in Zaidi and Shuraydi’s (2002) research, two women reported to agree to marry someone of their parents’ choice; however, they would like to interact with them to find out compatibility. Thus, this research suggests that the participants would like to redefine arranged marriages to allow for more time and interaction between the two individuals. This may explain the decline in arranged marriages as a form of mate selection over the years, as there is a preference for having more freedom to get to know someone, as found in Jones’s (2010) and Bisin and Verdier’s (2000) studies.

Mine (1988) argued that within a collectivist society individuals are passively trapped within a frame of model and unable generate change (Chirkov et al., 2010), which is contrary to this research, as the majority of South Asian women were able to make some changes even with limited personal agency (4.5.3 subtheme: ‘Negotiating Agency’). Fundamentally, this research attended to Pande’s (2015, p. 183) request for more understanding of the “cultural negotiations and reflexive engagements that are embedded” in the arranged marriage practice. Within Pande’s (2015, p. 10) research, women were found to be exercising some choice and agency through actively negotiating with their family in order to gain personal wishes through their arranged marriages. However, the actual ways in which individuals negotiated their personal



agency were not identified. It was found that some participants behaved as high level agents, as their actions were endorsed by meaningful personal motives aligned with their identity (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). For instance by adopting a more relational approach, one participant revealed she was able to communicate her needs and desires for more freedom, to make her parents understand her perspective and to relax the boundaries. Some participants used proxy agents who acted as a “*buffer*” between parents and the individuals. These buffers were often sisters, who acted as a spokesperson on behalf of the individual who was unable to communicate their needs and feelings to their parents, in order to make changes. In other circumstances, low-level agents were under situational control, whereby individuals remained obedient as it was not permitted to challenge their parents or ask them to change their ways (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). It could be said that through “transactional experiences with the environment”, this participant was unable to develop an agentic self due to the shared identity and her inability to challenge authority (Bandura, 2006, p. 169). Therefore, in some circumstances, personal agency is not achievable if there are power differentials; the individual hasn’t developed the ability to make changes to their circumstances and has a need to prioritise others before themselves.

Furthermore, participants within this study exhibited suppression of their emotions and needs through compliant behaviour and acceptance of their circumstances (4.5.4 Subtheme: ‘Managing the Distress Don’t “Rock the Boat”: Compliance and Acceptance’). Butler, Lee and Gross (2007) suggest suppression of emotions within the Asian community is a normative practice and is conducted for prosocial reasons, such as to maintain group harmony, rather than protecting the self. Arguably in this study, participants exhibited self protective behaviour as they avoided the distress for both themselves and for others by not creating a conflict. This was also evidenced in Jaspal’s (2014, p. 16) study, whereby South Asian males attempted to minimise a threat to their identity and increase their psychological wellbeing by “giving in”. This form of conformity is not just because of social pressure but also because there is a strong need to belong and connect to others (Kim & Markus, 1999). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1959) highlights that the self and in-group members are assimilated to one group identity (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Attempting to assert individuality by doing their “*own thing*” is considered to be deviant behaviour from the group norm, which could have consequential implications. For instance, a participant described that her compliant

and accepting behaviour is a result of her immaturity and fear of challenging authority. She experienced a strong “*trust*” in her parents as they have her wellbeing in mind. This was also echoed within Zaidi and Shuraydi’s (2002) study, whereby young Pakistani women, theoretically, would engage in an arranged marriage as they felt their parents knew best. For another participant, her lack of ability to exercise agency due to restrictive circumstances may leave her feeling helpless with no choice but to accept her circumstances. All the participants demonstrated some level of self sacrifice as a self protective strategy in order to alleviate tension, emotional distress, or conflict. Consequently, psychologically it could be argued that such experiences may result in greater consolidation of the false self, as a result of their true self being suppressed over time (Lemma, 2003).

Overall, the premarital experience demonstrates that, for South Asian women, they have to contend with multiple interacting forces (beliefs, family, gender, culture, time, others’ wellbeing, pressure, etc.), which all have a bearing on their decisions and the choices available to them. Within this research, the South Asian women have a strong awareness of the boundaries related to their cultural and religious beliefs. The key findings of this research are that in every aspect of the premarital experience, the South Asian women are awaiting for permission and a choice to be given. This in turns allows the women to express their own needs, identity, and permit women to exercise personal agency. Through assessing the boundaries, women will recognise whether they are able to negotiate with their families or not. For instance, some were able to negotiate their choice and exercise agency with their families through communication, whereas a few women were restricted by formidable boundaries (authoritarian parents) or didn’t have the maturity or the skills to challenge their circumstances. The implication of the decision-making not being collaborative, affected South Asian women’s wellbeing, as their needs were not taken into consideration, leaving them feeling objectified and like a bystander within their own marriage arrangements. Although, the wellbeing of others played a fundamental role in the decision-making process, however, tensions rose as South Asians not only valued their collective and relational identity, but also their individual identity. Those that were denied the expression of their individuality through their choices, found a delay in their personality development, contrary to those who were able to express themselves, felt a sense of empowerment and a rise in their self-esteem. Fundamentally, there are a range of experiences presented within this research;

however, variation and the complexity of experience are down to the participants' subjective interpretations of their experiences.

#### **5.4 IMPLICATION FOR THE WIDER CONTEXT**

Fundamentally, the aim of this research was to explore the South Asian women's premarital experiences of their arranged marriages. Implications from this study are hoped to aid teachers, mental health practitioners, social workers, and legal teams to better understand cross-cultural tensions and pressures that arise from South Asian women engaging in arranged marriages in Britain.

The complexity of the arranged premarital experience has been strongly illustrated to range from positive to negative experiences. Importantly, arranged marriage definitions largely ignore the experience of pressure within the arrangement process. Therefore, The Home Office may want reconsider the arranged marriage definition as it is strongly challenged by this research. Organisations such as the Forced Marriage Unit echo you have a right to "when you marry or if you marry at all" (FMU, 2017). On the contrary, the participants were not given a choice to marry but had partner choice within their "arranged" marriages. Hence, dichotomising the experience into two groups (arranged/forced) may not be helpful, as it limits individuals from accessing support, as their experience may not perfectly fall into those categories. A diagrammatic representation of the different forms of marriages on a continuum may help support services convey the complexities of arranged and forced marriage experiences. This may enable individuals to identify with their subjective experience and know where to access support.

In addition, there is a strong need for more education and community awareness regarding the complexities of the premarital experience of an arranged marriage. More awareness for both parents and children through religious organisations, support groups, and community work is required, for individuals to know about their basic human rights within Britain. Importantly, building awareness through these forums will develop insight into how South Asian women experience choice, consent, and pressure in the

context of marriage, which may allow individuals to critically review their own behaviours.

## **5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS**

There is a vast amount of stigma attached to experiencing psychological distress within the South Asian community. As a consequence, matters are confined to within the family (Chaudhry, 2016; Corrigan & Miller, 2004; Loya et al., 2010; Shariff, 2009). Therefore, more education is needed around the meaning of counselling, confidentiality, and interventions used to develop awareness in what support is available and how this can help.

Fundamentally, it is highly important for clinicians to develop self awareness, through reflective practice, of their own attitudes and beliefs towards South Asian women. This is to ensure biases or stereotypical assumptions that may limit openness are identified to ensure strengthening of the therapeutic relationship. Furthermore, practitioners are encouraged to take a curious stance to building their own awareness about the different marriage practices within the South Asian culture (Eleftheriadou, 2010). The marriage definitions are guidelines to understanding marriage practices; however, this research has highlighted definitional issues as a result of subjectivity of individuals' experiences. Practitioners should be aware that arranged marriages can be a positive experience, but also can change, as a result of marriage slippages, from arranged to forced. Individuals may not be aware of their circumstances (being pressured) and therefore practitioners may opt to sensitively explore their experience, by opening discussions on their wellbeing, pressures, implications of others' behaviour on them, and their desires. In addition, practitioners need to tread carefully as the meaning of choice (interdependent) for South Asian women has a different meaning to the western understanding of choice (independent), and therefore being cautious not to impose their own values as the norm (McGoldrick, Giordano & Garcia-Preto, 2005). Furthermore, it is found that choice has a strong expressive value. Subsequently, it is important to take a curious stance in exploring the meaning of choice, consent, and the experience of the marriage arrangements. In addition, there is a lack of awareness of a practitioner's clinical responsibility in breaking confidentiality, if an individual has disclosed their experience of being forced into a marriage, thus suggesting the need for more cross-cultural training on working with culturally sensitive issues.

When developing the formulation, the context is vital as religious and cultural beliefs provide valuable insight into the rationale for decisions made by individuals or others. It is exhibited within this study that South Asian women may hold two conflicting cultural or gendered identities or beliefs; therefore, it is important for exploration of their levels of acculturation, and integration of the individual's cultural and gendered identity. The discussion and resolving of cultural tensions or dilemma of attitudes or beliefs has found to alleviate some psychological distress by achieving a stronger sense of self (McGoldrick et al., 2005). Furthermore, the premarital experience was found to elicit negative emotions such as anxiety, fear and feeling overwhelmed and stressed. Due to the pace of the decision-making period, individuals are denied the opportunity for self reflection of their emotions, decisions, or experiences. It is encouraged to assist individuals to express and name their emotions, develop the ability to emotionally regulate themselves, and make links with their experience and emotions to build self awareness.

Due to the paradoxes highlighted within this study, the therapist can help the individual to identify these contradictions and assist in mediating through different states of feeling "powerful" and "powerless". As the contradictions may bring up conflict within their own internal world, it would be helpful for therapy to focus on this area and explore their thoughts, feelings and experiences in greater depths to help the individual manages these paradoxes.

In addition, therapy has the potential to bring up more dissonance for South Asian women than to alleviate it. As South Asian women have been coping by using conforming and self-sacrificing strategies, therapy may highlight alternatives that may conflict with their cultural beliefs and collective identity. Therefore, awareness of this may help practitioners to contain and assist the individual to explore new ways of thinking, new strategies, reflect upon conflicting thoughts, beliefs and feelings.

There is a strong tendency for South Asian women to focus on the wellbeing of others, particularly their family; therefore, within the therapeutic space it is encouraged that the client is prioritised (Rathor, 2011). In addition, some participants lacked involvement within the arrangement or the decision-making process, resulting in strong feelings of being objectified. Therefore, it is important that the participant's voice is heard within a safe place whereby their needs, desires, and feelings are explored in depth. Interestingly,

it was found that a few participants were able to communicate their needs to their family, whereas the majority engaged in self-sacrificing and compliant behaviour to avoid conflict or to keep their parents happy. Therefore, a nurturing environment that facilitates the expression of their individuality and needs may encourage their authentic self to be heard. Fundamentally, giving women a voice within the therapeutic space may feel empowering as it facilitates developing autonomy and assertiveness by understanding their own tensions and feelings through this process.

Additionally, participants felt misunderstood or that their opinions were not taken into account by family members. It could be proposed that a mentalisation-based strategy may be a helpful intervention, particularly for parents, to bring awareness of the individual's own mind but also the mind of others (Allen & Fonagy, 2006). Furthermore, the importance of interpersonal relationships and family dynamics within the South Asian culture is fundamental. Therefore, systemic interventions such as family therapy may be beneficial for parents and individuals to understand their family dynamics and communicate their interpersonal tensions (Gurman, 2014). Through this intervention, parents and young people explore their feelings and thoughts in a safe place, to understand each other's experiences and different points of view, to appreciate each other's desires, and to work towards making changes and developing their relationships to become more collaborative and equal in power dynamics.

## **5.6 EVALUATION OF METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS**

This section evaluates the study in compliance with Yardley's (2000) guidelines for good qualitative research and validity (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009):

- Sensitivity to context
- Commitment and rigour
- Transparency and coherence
- Impact and importance

Smith et al. (2009) advocate using this approach in evaluating IPA research along with an audit trail (see Appendix 10-13). To ensure close measures of the participants' meaning during the analysis stages, it was highly important to remain mindful of cross-contamination of researcher's own thoughts and feelings. Therefore, to ensure quality of

the data and reliability, data was checked by peers and supervisor to ensure neutrality within the process. The researcher noticed being drawn to the negative experiences, which identifies some of the assumptions that she holds. An example of this was the recruitment poster which demonstrated some of biases or assumptions by the leading question presented. This could be a limitation as the research may draw participants with particular experiences. However, the researcher ensured that she was actively guided by the data within the analysis process, to ensure all the participants' voices were equally represented and findings are based on participants' responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher.

In addition, to ensure transparency and coherence, the researcher produced interpretations of the data by providing extracts of the participants' words, to enable the readers to generate an understanding of how the interpretations were developed and embedded within the data. The research being reflexive (see Reflexivity Chapter 6 and Appendix 14) can provide quality evaluation, as the researcher was able to track her own thoughts and feelings throughout the research process. This demonstrates transparency and credibility, which many researchers fail to engage with, adopting a position of separateness within the process (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

Fundamentally, this study was conducted from a qualitative position, with an idiographic focus, providing a valuable opportunity for South Asian women to voice their premarital experiences and the meanings attributed to their lived arranged marriage experience, which have been largely disregarded within literature to date. Crucially, it was the methodological advantage that enabled this study to develop rich data from the South Asian women. Moreover, the detailed nuance in their subjective experience is fundamentally of such clinical value for practitioners, as it adds a quality of depth to understanding human behaviour.

As mentioned above, this study provides valuable and meaningful findings to the wider discourse, but like all research, however, it does possess some noteworthy limitations. For instance, this study explored premarital experiences, which are of a retrospective nature. Nevertheless, the phenomenological "experience is uniquely embodied, situated and perspectival" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). However, a retrospective account could be contaminated with post-marriage experiences and re-evaluation of past behaviours, which can lead to distortion of memories when recalled. This was evident within the

interview stages, as participants would shift focus on their post-marriage experience and also express difficulty in recalling their experiences. Therefore, the fundamental aim is for “the thing itself as it appears to show itself” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 24). Subsequently, the methodological changes that would be considered if this research were to be repeated, would be to interview participants as their marriage was being arranged. This may provide richer descriptions, meanings, and insight of the phenomena in the moment, as it is being lived and experienced.

The issue of homogeneity is of relevance when considering this study. The relative homogenous sample considers the research questions meaningful for the sample in question (Smith et al., 2009). Although many researchers have used the umbrella term “South Asian” within their research (Bhopal, 1999; Gangoli et al., 2006; Jaspal, 2014), the variation amongst different ethnic groups and sub groups (castes) within the South Asian community may not be “contained within the analysis of the phenomena” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49). Furthermore, generational differences, whereby there may be a difference in the length of assimilation into the British culture, their age, and length of marriage, are all factors that may shed different perspectives on their subjective experience, as well as the analysis of the data. Nevertheless, due to pragmatic restrictions, this led to a flexible homogenous sample within this research, which contributes to a broad understanding of the phenomena in question, and still adds qualitative value to the wider literature.

Morrow (2005) suggests frequently that Counselling Psychology research papers come under scrutiny due to concerns raised about the number of samples and the lack of generalisation to the wider community. Although this research recruited seven participants, numbers mean very little within a qualitative study, as the quality, length, and depth of the interview data are valued more highly (Morrow, 2005). Subsequently, it is argued less is more for IPA studies, and therefore a purposeful small sample is substantial (Smith et al., 2009). The purpose of qualitative methodologies within Counselling Psychology is to provide psychologists and other professional practitioners with the insight of the complexities of human interaction in their day to day lives, in rich detail. Significantly, this form of learning is informative to understanding the complexities in human interaction.

## **5.7 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**



Following this study, further research is required in exploring the premarital experiences for specific cultural groups and generational differences. This is to ensure the South Asian diasporas' inter-subjectivity, that is present within different ethnic groups, is explored. Although this research gives a broad understanding of the premarital experiences of South Asian women within an arranged marriage, it does fail to explore those who have limited use of the English language. Consequently, this restricts the exploration of alternative beliefs and meanings, which will not be contaminated by western concepts, and may be interpreted differently which could add qualitative value to the literature. Fundamentally, it would be interesting to consider gender differences, as well as parents and non Asians, as they are largely overlooked within this area of research. Gender inequality is present as unapproved behaviour (dating) for women, is condoned for men. Differences in samples can shed light on the various experiences of the phenomena in question. Furthermore, interestingly, this research highlighted Reeya's experience as a possible slippage into a forced marriage. There is a strong ambivalence felt by Reeya on how to classify her marriage (arranged/forced). This notion of 'slippage' could be explored in greater depth to understand the transitional experience (Gangoli et al., 2006).

## **5.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Overall, this research explored the lived premarital experiences of South Asian women and their experience of choice. Clearly, the real life premarital experiences of South Asian women are complex, multifaceted, and this research can only provide some insight into the general picture. Nevertheless, this insight is of value, as it unravels the depth of the lived experiences and meanings for women. It was found that having religious and cultural beliefs laid the conditions that all had to abide to. Whilst the boundaries are rigid, the research identified how the South Asian women within this research negotiated within the cultural and religious boundaries. In essence, there was a significant echo from South Asian women to be more involved within the premarital process. Although, in some cases, the arranged marriage practice was perceived as a positive experience, due to the retrospective nature, it could be argued the experience has been re-evaluated with new information. Nonetheless, many would like to reframe the practice to be more collaborative, whereby women have the opportunity to freely express themselves, and for this to be accepted. Finally, the South Asian women within

the study are slowly changing their cultural and gender identity, where permitted, as they strive to attain something meaningful and aligned with their true selves.

## **CHAPTER 6: REFLEXIVITY**

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### **6.1 RESEARCHER REFLEXIVITY**

Reflexivity is a familiar concept within the qualitative research realm and fundamental to providing a holistic approach to psychological research (Shaw, 2010; Willig, 2008). Reflexivity involves the development of self-awareness through critical reflections, to understand how the researcher constructs knowledge, and what factors influence the construction of knowledge and how these have influence during planning, data collection and the interpretation stages (Frost, 2011; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Willig, 2001). This highlights reflexivity as an ongoing process which permeates every stage of the research journey (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). By being open, this gives the reader insight of the researcher's "personal tales" and how this position enables or limits them within the research process (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 741; Watt, 2007). Reflexive considerations will be discussed within this chapter to highlight my positioning, identity, assumptions and beliefs, and the implication of this in accordance to the research process.

### **6.2 PERSONAL REFLEXIVITY**

I am a 30 year old British Asian female, with both parents born in India who then migrated to the UK at the age of 11 and 21 years old. Both have assimilated to the western culture but do uphold some of the Indian traditions and beliefs. Having friends who have experienced intense and enduring pressure to get married, compared to others experiencing the freedom of choice to pick their own partners, felt unfair. Therefore to avoid contamination of the data and confirmation of my own beliefs and assumptions, frequent journaling within my research journal enabled me to monitor and recognise the emergence of any personal biases (See Appendix 14). Documenting ensured that the participants' voices are conveyed through the data and helped maintain a position of

curiosity. Furthermore, regular consultations with my therapist, research supervisors and peers have helped to understand, challenge and manage some of my own researcher biases and check for validity of the data.

Initially my interest was to research those within forced marriages. However, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, definitional issues, time constraints and recruitment difficulties within the Asian community, this led to a directional change within my research. Furthermore, the term forced marriage has a negative connotation and is a western construct, so individuals may lack awareness of the term or not want to attribute this term to their own experiences, which may hinder people from taking part. Upon reflection, this may suggest that people define their marriage differently, which validated the reason to focus on arranged marriages.

I decided to rethink my research aims and through this process and personal experiences of people around me, I started to explore some beliefs and assumptions I had. Using my research journal and personal therapy, I realised, that I believed that some people classify their marriage experience as ‘arranged’ but through subtle pressures they didn’t feel they had much of a choice. This opened up the question whether this is considered a forced marriage. Being transparent within this research and recognising my need to bracket my preconceptions and assumptions, led me to want to explore the subjective experiences of the participants who have had an arranged marriage. Due to changes of my initial proposal, I informed the Research Ethics Committee to change my title and methodology which was approved (see Appendix 2 & 3).

### **6.3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL REFLEXIVITY**

Establishing my epistemological position as a researcher has been a developing process during this study. The critical-ideological paradigm encapsulates the core values of Counselling Psychology which is to empower people within power dynamics. The aim is to encourage change and emancipation from restrictive practices. The inquirer’s voice confronts ignorance and misapprehensions and challenges the status quo to strive for balance within society (Asghar, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115). However this position was disregarded as it is based upon the researcher’s assumptions that a particular sample group are emancipated. Therefore as a scientist-practitioner that holds a more curious stance; an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm is more of an appropriate position for this inquiry (Ponterotto, 2005).

#### **6.4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS REFLEXIVITY**

Due to the qualitative nature of the research it would be unfeasible to be completely detached from the process due to ‘co-construction’ of findings (Willig, 2008). By being a partial ‘insider’ from a specific ethnicity within the South Asian community, gave value to the research as I hold a relatively authentic understanding of the South Asian culture. However, familiarity could be considered limiting as it may lead to narrowing and loss of objectivity (Greene, 2014). For instance, by not requesting a participant to elaborate on a word, because of my own awareness of what it means in their language, demonstrates a difficulty in dichotomising between being the insider and the researcher. Furthermore, as a researcher with multiple identities which draws from various theoretical frameworks, the difficulties in negotiating these identities during the process were more apparent. It is important to highlight that my cultural background, professional identity and personal experiences will influence my interpretations of the data. Being a trainee Counselling Psychologist, it was evident that on one occasion I was tempted to go into therapist mode to explore the dilemma the participant was involved in surrounding her wanting to pursue her own aspirations versus making her family happy. Due to my self-awareness, I was able to recognise my tendency to make links for the participant. As the interview schedule is flexible, we were able to explore her dilemma and so the participant was able to recognise the rationale for her behaviour. This was fundamental to the inquiry as this could possibly inform clinical practice into how practitioners can relieve psychological distress through exploration of their lived experiences and working through internal conflicts.

During the analysis and recruitment process I noticed that it was difficult to distance myself and to remain neutral. An example of this is the poster used for recruitment (see Appendix 4) which poses a strong leading question. Through the support of personal therapy and reflexivity, I realised the tension of being from a British culture that values individuality versus a collectivist society which primarily values others’ wellbeing. This tension of ‘us versus I’ became more apparent through my personal reflexive journaling which highlighted the similarities of my own personal conflict of having a bicultural identity. To ensure credibility and verification of my themes, I endorsed triangulation

by using my peers and supervisor as a way of reviewing my themes to avoid researcher bias. Regular discussions enabled me to think critically and acknowledge whether my opinions and feelings had an implication on my judgement and themes (Greene, 2014).

Furthermore, reflections on the meaning of forced marriage initially meant having no partner choice and being physically or mentally pressured to get married. Post research, I have realised the definitions are not as simplistic, that the experience of any form of marriage is complex and subjective, with a variety of emotions and thoughts throughout the arrangement process. It is also important to note there is a range of positive to negatives experiences during the arranged marriage process.

Due to the richness of the data from the participants, this research was able to gain some understanding of the complexity of the arranged marriage process. This is beneficial as the research can enrich practitioners, and other professionals with valuable insights, coping strategies, belief systems and differences of cultural marriage practices around the world.

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# **Appendix 1: Original Letter of Ethical Approval from the Research Ethics Committee**

## **NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION**

### **For research involving human participants**

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

**SUPERVISOR:** Jane Lawrence

**REVIEWER:** Fevronia Christodoulidi

**STUDENT:** Divya Patel

**Title of proposed study:** An exploration into women's choice and premarital experiences of forced marriages within a South Asian community. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

**Course:** Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

**DECISION** (*Delete as necessary*)

**\*APPROVED, BUT MINOR CONDITIONS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES**

**APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

**APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

**NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

**Minor amendments required** (*for reviewer*):

I believe that this student's proposal application shows consideration and relevant measures/preparation taken in relation to the potential ethical matters/protection of interview participants.

What is unclear is whether the researcher/student has had a personal experience herself of the topic she will be investigating. If yes, then it would be useful to declare/discuss with her supervisor about how she will address the potential emotional impact that the conduct of her study may have on herself (i.e. emotional sources of support available for the researcher, in case the involvement with such topic holds personal resonance)

**Major amendments required** (*for reviewer*):

**Confirmation of making the above minor amendments** (*for students*):

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name *Divya Patel*

Student number: u0500661

Date: 15/09/2015

### **ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER** *(for reviewer)*

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐

HIGH

☐

MEDIUM

☐

LOW

*Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):*

Please see my comments above – in case the researcher has had personal experience of the topic herself (not indicated in the proposal, hence am unclear)

**Reviewer** *(Typed name to act as signature):* Dr. Fevronia Christodoulidi

**Date:** 27.8.2015

*This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee (moderator of School ethics approvals)*

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

\*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

\*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, travel approval from UEL (not the School of Psychology) must be gained if a researcher intends to travel overseas to collect data, even if this involves the researcher travelling to his/her home country to conduct the research. Application details can be found here: <http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/>

**Appendix 2: Amendments Approval Form**

**UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON  
School of Psychology**

**REQUEST FOR AMENDMENT TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION**

**FOR BSc, MSc/MA & TAUGHT PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS**

**Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for proposed amendment(s) to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology.**

Note that approval must be given for significant change to research procedure that impacts on ethical protocol. If you are not sure about whether your proposed amendment warrants approval consult your supervisor or contact Dr Mark Finn (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee).

### **HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THE REQUEST**

1. Complete the request form electronically and accurately.
2. Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).
3. When submitting this request form, ensure that all necessary documents are attached (see below).
4. Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to: Dr Mark Finn at [m.finn@uel.ac.uk](mailto:m.finn@uel.ac.uk)
5. Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with reviewer's response box completed. This will normally be within five days. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your project/dissertation/thesis.
6. Recruitment and data collection are **not** to commence until your proposed amendment has been approved.

### **REQUIRED DOCUMENTS**

1. A copy of your previously approved ethics application with proposed amendments(s) added as tracked changes.
2. Copies of updated documents that may relate to your proposed amendment(s). For example an updated recruitment notice, updated participant information letter, updated consent form etc.
3. A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.

Name of applicant: Divya Patel

Programme of study: Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Title of research: An exploration into women's choice and pre-marital experiences of arranged marriages within a South Asian community. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Name of supervisor: Jane Lawrence

Briefly outline the nature of your proposed amendment(s) and associated rationale(s) in the boxes below

<b>Proposed amendment</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Changing research participants to those who are entering, currently in or have been in an arranged marriage.	As a result of having difficulties with recruiting those who are no longer in a forced marriage.
<p>Title change:</p> <p>An exploration into women's choice and premarital experiences of arranged marriages within a South Asian community. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.</p>	Changes to research participants.
<p>Research questions changed:</p> <p>What was South Asian women's premarital experience of arranged marriages?</p> <p>How does South Asian women experience choice within the decision making process of getting married?</p>	Changes to research participants.

<b>Please tick</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed amendment(s) and agree to them?	x	

Student's signature (please type your name): Divya Patel

Date: 03/12/15

TO BE COMPLETED BY REVIEWER		
<b>Amendment(s) approved</b>	YES	
<b>Comments</b>		



--

Reviewer:

Date:

### **Appendix 3: Amendments Approval Email**

## Re: Ethics

Mary Spiller

Thu 07/01/2016 10:21

To: Divya PATEL <u0500661@uel.ac.uk>;

Cc: Jane Lawrence <j.lawrence@uel.ac.uk>; Lisa Fellin <L.C.Fellin@uel.ac.uk>; Psychology Ethics <psychology.ethics@uel.ac.uk>;

1 attachments (18 KB)

Amendment request Divya Patel.docx;

Please find attached your completed Ethics Amendment Approval form  
best wishes with your research  
Mary

---

**From:** Divya PATEL

**Sent:** 14 December 2015 17:26

**To:** Mary Spiller

**Cc:** Jane Lawrence; Lisa Fellin

**Subject:** FW: Ethics

Dear Ms Spiller,

Please find my ethics amendment form and my amended ethics application as an attachment. Thank you.

Kind regards,

Divya

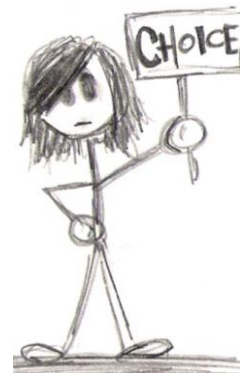
## Appendix 4: Research Study Poster

**HAVE YOU BEEN IN/OUT OF  
AN **ARRANGED MARRIAGE**?**



**DID YOU  
FEEL **UNDER PRESSURE** TO  
AGREE TO IT?**

**ARE YOU .. A FEMALE, FROM A  
SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY  
AND OVER 18 YEARS OF AGE?**



**IF SO.. WOULD YOU LIKE TO TALK  
ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN  
CONFIDENCE?**

**THEN... PLEASE CONTACT ME DIVYA  
PATEL ON EMAIL:  
U0500661@UEL.AC.UK FOR FURTHER  
INFORMATION.**

## Information Leaflet

***Title of research: An exploration into women's choice and premarital experiences of arranged marriages within a South Asian community. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.***

You are invited to take part in a research study. To help you decide whether you wish to participate please read the following information explaining the purpose of the study and how it will be conducted.

### **What is the study about?**

Literature has documented the practices of forced marriages in particular the lived experience of South Asian women. There is a varying degree of choice given within arranged marriages with no choice given to those within forced marriages. According to literature, different levels of coercion are enforced to compel a marriage, these range from subtle psychological pressure to physical pressures. It is evident that such experiences can affect the psychological wellbeing of these individuals. Therefore, the present study engages in a qualitative exploration of South Asian women's choice and their premarital experiences of an arranged marriage. The findings will hope to inform Counselling Psychologist practices by increasing their understanding of South Asian females' experiences of arranged marriages. As well as inform appropriate service provisions for those within these marriages.

### **Who are we looking for?**

South Asian women over 18 years old who have experienced or entering into an arranged marriage.

### **What would taking part in the study involve?**

Participants are invited to take part in a individual interview of approximately one hour. The interview will consists of open questions which aims to explore their pre-marital experience and their involvement in making a choice towards their marriage. The interview will be audio recorded, with participants' permission, a transcript of which will be made available to the participants on request. Interviews will take place in your [charity name] or at University of East London at a time convenient to you.

### **What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?**

There are no clear risks or disadvantages of taking part in this study. However, If you do experience any problems, distress or feel uncomfortable and do not wish to answer the question, then you have the right to skip the question, withdraw or postpone the study. The researcher will provide you with a list of contacts, should you wish to contact external services for additional support.

Please note if the participant wishes to withdraw later once the final research has been submitted, then the researchers reserves the rights to use the data and the information can no longer be withdrawn.

### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All interviews will be treated confidentially in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988 and research guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society. Interviews will be transcribed and analysed, to be used as part of a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology thesis, which will be available on request. Any information provided during the interview will be anonymised when presenting extracts from the analysis of the interview data, in order that the speaker's identity cannot be identified. Recorded and transcribed material will be kept in a locked cabinet and destroyed after 5 years from when the research has been completed.

### **What is offered?**

A maximum of £20 will be offered to you as reimbursement of your travel expenses.

### **Who is doing the research?**

The research is being conducted by Divya Patel, a trainee Counselling Psychologist at the University of East London, undertaking a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. The research will be supervised by Dr Jane Lawrence who is my director of studies. The research details of the project have been scrutinised and received ethical approval by the University of East London.

### **Please contact the Primary Researcher if you like to take part:**

#### Primary Researcher

Divya Patel  
School Of Psychology  
University of East London  
Water Lane  
Stratford  
E15 4LZ  
Tel: 07756104885  
E-mail: u0500661@uel.ac.uk

#### Director of Studies

Jane Lawrence  
School Of Psychology  
University of East London  
Water Lane  
Stratford  
E15 4LZ  
Tel: 07841 977 752  
E.mail: j.lawrence@uel.ac.uk

### **University Research Ethics Committee**

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact the Secretary of the University Research ethics Committee: Mark Finn (Chair School of Psychology)  
Administrative Officer for Research,  
Graduate School,  
University of East London,  
Docklands Campus,  
London E16 2RD (Tel: 0208 223 4493)

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet**

# CONSENT FORM

## UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

### **Consent to Participate in a Research Programme Involving the Use of Human Participants**

Title of research: *An exploration into women's choice and premarital experiences of arranged marriages within a South Asian community. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.*

I have read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep.

The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher(s) involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the research programme has been completed.

I hereby fully and freely consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me.

Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the programme at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's name (BLOCK CAPITALS):

.....

Participant's signature:

.....

Investigator's name: DIVYA PATEL

Investigator's signature:

.....

Date: .....

## Appendix 7: Demographic Questionnaire Form

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

This form is to get some basic information about you (such as your age, ethnicity and marital status). The reason that I'd like this information is so that I can show those who read my research report that I managed to obtain the views of a cross-section of people. The information that you give will not be used to identify you in any way as this research is entirely confidential. However, if you don't want to answer some of these questions, please don't feel that you have too.

1. **Are you?** *(tick the appropriate answer)*

Male ☐

Female ☐

2. **How old are you?** [     ] years

3. **How would you describe your ethnic origins?**

Choose one section from below and then tick the appropriate category to indicate your ethnic background.

**(a) Asian or Asian British**

Indian ☐

Pakistani ☐

Bangladeshi ☐

Chinese ☐

Any other Asian background, please write in below

---

**(b) Other ethnic group**

Any other ethnic group, please write in below

---

4. **What is your current *legal* marital status?** *(tick the appropriate answer)*

Single ☐

Married ☐

Civil partnership ☐

Divorced/separated ☐

Widowed ☐



## **Appendix 8: Example of Interview Schedule**

### **Interview Schedule**

***What is your current marriage status at the moment? Remarry? Entering into a marriage?***

***What views do people within your community have on marriage?***

***How do they agree with your views?***

- *How do they disagree with your views?*

***How would you define an arranged and a forced marriage?***

- *What are the similarities and differences between the two types of marriages?*

***What is the process of making a decision of who you are going to marry within your community?***

***How does gender affect the decision making process of who they are going to marry?***

***What was your experience of this?***

- *How did you feel at the time?*

***At this point, how were you involved in the decision making process?***

- *Who else was involved in this process?*

***What would you want differently?***

- *What does choice mean to you?*
- *What would it mean to you to have a choice within this process?*
- *How were you pressured?*
- *Can you give me a specific example of this pressure/choice?*

***How did this impact you? Wellbeing? Physically? Mentally? Relationships?***

- *Tell me more about the impact?*
- *How were you supported throughout this experience?*



## **DEBRIEFING SHEET**

### **THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY!**

If you were upset, disturbed, or distressed, by participating in this study, or found out information about yourself which cause some distressed, then please refer to the contact details provided with external support services.

Please see below for contact details for external support services:

**Newham Asian women's Project:**

**East London**

**020 8472 0528**

[www.nawp.org](http://www.nawp.org)

**Ashiana Project:**

**London**

**020 8539 0427**

[www.ashiana.org.uk](http://www.ashiana.org.uk)

**Forced Marriage Unit**

[fm@fco.gov.uk](mailto:fm@fco.gov.uk)

Telephone: 020 7008 0151

From overseas: +44 (0)20 7008 0151

Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Out of hours: 020 7008 1500 (ask for the Global Response Centre)

Also, if you have any questions, feedback, concerns or like to know more about this study, you are encouraged to contact Divya Patel (researcher) on Tel: 07756104885 or E-mail: [u0500661@uel.ac.uk](mailto:u0500661@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you again for your participation.



## Appendix 10: Example of One Interview Transcript with Initial and Exploratory Comments contributing to the Emergent Theme

Emergent Themes		Transcript	Exploratory Commentary: Descriptive, Linguistic and Conceptual
	5	<b>R: Ok great, just tell me a little bit</b>	Highlights <i>marriage is important</i> , 'very' by the term <i>very</i> . I'm wondering
	6	<b>what views do people within your</b>	<u>whether it is important for her?</u>
	7	<b>community have marriage.</b>	Anticipation of turning of age?
Community	8	P3: Umm.. so <u>it sort of a very</u>	'They' – the community/parents? Others start the process of gathering
	9	<u>important aspect um within the</u>	information from 'you'.
Marriage is important	10	<u>community</u> um. As soon as the girl	Community perceives what is an acceptable age, <u>implying an questioning</u>
Family	11	<u>hits 22 23 they will start talking</u>	<u>stance</u>
	12	<u>about it and will start asking you the</u>	<u>Exploratory questioning to understand relationship situation with the</u>
Marital age	13	<u>questions.</u> When are you going to	participant?/Understand thoughts of when she is hoping to get married?
	14	start looking for somebody or have	I'm wondering whether she feels a certain amount of pressure through
Pressure	15	to found somebody or <u>when are</u>	<u>questioning parents because her parents feel pressure from others?</u>
	16	<u>you getting married?</u> Um and in	<u>Uncomfortable feeling and therefore rationalizes the behavior through</u>
Societal pressure	17	<u>turn your parents feel.. a certain</u>	<u>expressing how this is how it is in society as she refer to 'your parents'?</u>
	18	<u>level of pressure</u> to start talking to	<u>Difficult acknowledging her own parents are feeling this pressure? Who do</u>
The ripple of pressure	19	<u>their children about getting</u>	<u>they feel pressure from?</u>
	20	<u>married.</u> [R:hmm] So yeah quite an	Acknowledging parents involvement and impact on them.
Marriage necessity	21	<u>important.. factor almost like an</u>	<i>Sinking feeling when said 'feel' – Ripple effect of societal pressure onto</i>
	22	<u>necessary part of life</u> that it means	<i>parents, children. Pressure to start the conversation? Middlemen.</i>
	23	to happen <u>sort of mid mid 20s.</u>	<i>Minimises the importance of it 'quite'</i>
	24	<b>R: Ok and you spoke about your</b>	'Necessary' – why is it necessary? It has to happen between 20s – mid, rigidity
	25	<b>parents starting to feel a bit of</b>	
	26	<b>pressure [P3: um hum], tell me</b>	
	27	<b>about what that was like what</b>	
	28	<b>happens?</b>	
	29	P3: So for me sort of [sighs] about a	<i>Disappointment that this started a year after graduation – 'sigh'.</i>

Community	30	year after I graduated so around the	The heaviness of the 'sigh' possibly demonstrates the effect of attending community events? But acknowledges the heaviness for her mother being asked questions.
	31	age of 22 generally when <u>we go out</u>	<u>Mother would experience pressure from others within the community.</u>
Family	32	to community events or weddings	<u>Possibly questioning what she is doing – feeling embarrassed by not 'knowing' what to say. Possibly feeling compelled by her 'need' to question daughter?</u>
	33	or family gatherings um.. <u>my mum</u>	
	34	<u>would start getting questions</u> “so	
Pressure	35	when are you going to start looking	To find the response asks daughter?
	36	for your daughter?” etc etc. So	<i>Difficulty using the work 'pressure?' by saying 'not pressure' but acknowledging as pressure.</i>
Unknown answer	37	obviously for them <u>she starts feeling</u>	Higher tone on pressure – heavy burden?
	38	<u>she needs to have a like a response</u>	The unknown creating distress for the mother?
Pressure through questioning behaviour	39	um and I think <u>that pressure on</u>	
	40	<u>her.. not pressure</u> but I think the	<u>Implying difference in context when she was raised? Comparison of life schedules.</u>
Alleviation of distress	41	<u>pressure of getting asked</u> that	<i>'hitting' – strong emotion at 22? Bashed? Abruptness of marriage talks?</i>
	42	<u>question and not knowing</u> what to	Measuring her schedule with her daughter's schedule. Lack of flexibility with time.
	43	<u>say. She then starts talking to me,</u>	<i>'Appropriate' for whom?</i>
	44	now my mum was <u>born and raised</u>	Through the lag, there appears to be a sense of urgency to start thinking/behaving in order to help with the process of finding a life partner?
Experience	45	<u>in India she was married at the age</u>	Through this questioning it appears it was causing some pressure? 'When are you' – a sense of sharing responsibility? It appears she adopted a defensive position 'fend off' to try and delay the process as a way of managing the pressure?
	46	<u>of 20. [R: hmm] So when I was</u>	Frustrated the lack of thinking? Into more supportive?
	47	hitting 22 it was <u>already 2 years</u>	<i>'those' – marriage questions?</i>
	48	<u>behind</u> what for her an <u>appropriate</u>	
Context	49	<u>schedule of life</u> almost. Um so she	
Comparison of life schedules	50	then started talking to me “ok.. so	
Urgency	51	<u>have you met anybody, if not, when</u>	
Overwhelmed	52	<u>are you going to start thinking</u>	
Pressure –	53	<u>about.. can we start introducing you</u>	
Coping strategy	54	<u>to people?”. Um I started to get all</u>	
	55	<u>those questions</u> which <u>I tried to</u>	
	56	<u>fend off for as long as I could</u>	

	57	[laughs].	<i>'Fend off' – coping strategy laughs – uncomfortable with the act? Why was she trying to delay? Lower tone on 'tried' – a secret?</i>
Lack of readiness	58	<b>R: And how did you feel about</b>	Being honest and expressing herself.
	59	<b>having all these questions?</b>	<i>'Completely' - partially ready but partially wanted more time?</i>
	60	P3: Um really and truly at that stage	Time – importance of time
Time	61	of my life <u>I wasn't completely ready</u>	Wanting time to establish herself?
Independence	62	um I still <u>wanted a year or two</u> to	Wanting to have fun, independence b/c of money
	63	sort of.. <u>find my feet to get myself a</u>	<i>'Your' - perception of others and what is expected within society between uni.</i>
	64	<u>good job</u> and <u>to enjoy life</u> that sort	<u>I'm wondering whether the client is wanting independence/freedom</u>
Tension/Dilemma	65	of <u>period between Uni</u> and when	<u>Tension/Dilemma; wanting more time vs receiving pressure to get married –</u>
	66	<u>your free you get to have a lot more</u>	<u>how does she manage the tension/ delaying the process?</u>
	67	<u>independence</u> you've <u>got money</u>	
Family	68	<u>because your working you can enjoy</u>	<u>Importance of parents – child relationship, parents are authoritarian. Can't go</u>
Always listen to	69	<u>life</u> a little bit more. Um but for me	<u>against parents and must be obedient? I'm wondering whether it is respect?</u>
parents	70	the way <u>I've been brought</u> up to	<u>Implying that when mother asking question the need to conform to parental</u>
Culture	71	<u>always listen to my parents</u> and sort	<u>wishes? Possibility of pressure on self to start thinking about it.</u>
Subjugate to	72	of if they say something it's like	Culture context/time
Authoritarian Parents	73	<u>yeah fine</u> yeah I'll <u>do it like</u> .. ranging	<i>'Always' – rigid – no flexibility in disputing her parents – no option</i>
	74	from she tells me to do a chore in	<i>'fine' – questions whether she is?</i>
	75	the house to any think. So when	<i>'fine' emphasised – stronger tone – Anger having to conform?</i>
	76	she's started talking to me <u>I thought</u>	Lists examples of her abiding to them.
	77	<u>well actually</u> maybe <u>I should start</u> ..	<u>Mother's role in approaching daughter – tension experienced by mother</u>
Pressure	78	<u>thinking about it.</u> The <u>way</u> she used	<u>holding community/daughter wishes in mind? Intention of mother?</u>
Self pressure	79	<u>to say it</u> as well "if you start looking	<i>'She' – mother? Instigator of conversation</i>
Persuading mother	80	<u>nowww</u> in 2 3 years you will be 25	Caused her distressed by the way she said it – mother rationalized the need
Beliefs around age	81	by then". It was like that <u>was such</u>	to start.
	82	<u>an old age</u> [R:hmm] um in the sense	Gave her an incentive to start.
	83	of the community and um so I	<i>'Now' – exaggerating her need to start the process immediately?</i>

	84	thought ok well maybe <u>I should</u>	Lack of conversation of what she wants – lack of agency – <i>‘talking to me’ not with me.</i>
	85	<u>start</u> and then after about 6 months	Exaggerates 25 by then and ‘old age’ – both like a bad thing?
<b>Coping strategies</b>	86	to a year I was <u>almost saying no not</u>	<i>‘Should’ – put pressure on self to start the process</i>
Avoidance of readiness	87	<u>yet not yet. I think the pressure</u>	Strategies of managing the pressure/distress? However it was too
Overwhelmed	88	<u>started to.. getting to me eventually</u>	<u>overwhelming and led to concede to it.</u>
	89	and I was like that’s <u>fine you can</u>	Delay tactics, avoidance – exhausting?
Surrender to pressure	90	<u>start</u> introducing me to people and	<i>‘no’ – higher pitch to make it as though it is not an issue</i>
	91	<u>putting the word out there so to</u>	Too much to take – had to back down?
Incongruence with self	92	<u>speak.</u>	<i>‘that’s fine’ – subjugated</i>
	93	<b>R: When you said the pressure was</b>	
	94	<b>starting to get to you what do you</b>	<u>I’m wondering whether the community are scaremongering tactic as a way of</u>
	95	<b>mean by that?</b>	<u>putting pressure on her. Fear of lack of choice</u>
	96	P3: So.. <u>not just</u> my parents but	<i>‘not just’ suggesting others too that are pressuring her – the community</i>
	97	even people in the community <u>they</u>	<i>‘they’ – others?</i>
<b>Community</b>	98	<u>start saying “oh well you know the</u>	
	99	<u>later you make it there won’t be</u>	Guilt trip – fear of loneliness?
Scaremongering	100	<u>any guys left in the community”</u>	<i>‘everyone’ – she perceives everybody is in this process and getting married.</i>
	101	because <u>everyone</u> starting to get	<i>She’s different?</i>
	102	married off they either have met	Speaking faster, annoyance?
	103	somebody, people have already	
Stocks are running out	104	met at Uni or work obviously	Fear of no one is available – laughs to cope with the fear/using humour
	105	they’ve already met. It was almost	
	106	like the <u>stocks are running out</u>	Other’s only have half and age is a factor on how many will be left
<b>Choice</b>	107	[laughs]. Um so it was like well um	Suggesting – depletion means no choice?
	108	<u>50% of people met people 50% of</u>	<u>Wanting more options of pool of people within this process</u>
Fear of lack of choice	109	<u>guys have met someone at Uni and</u>	
	110	<u>you’ve only got 50% of guys to</u>	<i>‘Accounts’ – interesting word – sees it like transactions - distancing</i>

Perceptions/judgments	111	<u>effectively</u> have in terms of <u>choice</u>	'They' – guys? What others are doing?
	112	and <u>the longer you wait</u> those start	
	113	going to get, the accounts going to	
	114	<u>get lower and lower</u> they are going	
Community	115	to meet someone and they <u>are all</u>	Fear of being left behind? Lack of options/restrictions. ' <u>I have to choose</u> ' –
	116	<u>going</u> to start getting married. <u>In my</u>	lack of amount of choice. I'm wondering if she's implying the leftovers are not
	117	<u>head</u> actually I don't <u>want to be left</u>	good? Or she will be a leftover? Recognised it is not a nice way of referring to
Fear of potential	118	with the 10 at the end [laughs] that	someone? Blames others for style of thinking? Environmental influences on
leftover	119	<u>I have to choose</u> from.. the <u>leftovers</u>	thinking? Difficulty to challenge thinking ' <u>can't see beyond</u> '. Uni being a
	120	<u>so to speak</u> . It's <u>really bad</u> but that's	place that is 'different' in thinking – possibly due to variety of people from
Attitude influence	121	the way it almost get <u>portrayed to</u>	similar ages? She continues to talk about uni being a real world – suggesting
	122	<u>you</u> and when you're living in the	the community is not in a real world – restrictive thinking?
	123	<u>that environment constantly</u> um	'Leftover' – derogatory comment to describe those that are unmarried,
	124	you <u>can't see</u> beyond that after a	ashamed of saying it 'really bad'? How they are perceived in society?
	125	<u>while</u> because when you're at Uni	Worthless? Fear of this?
	126	it's a little <u>bit different</u> but when	Rationalises the thought by blaming others/environmental influences?
	127	you're <u>outside in the real world</u> my	Can't see – restrictive thinking – can't adopt alternative way of viewing it.
		<u>community is quite small</u> in that	Environmental influences on thinking/brainwashed.
			Community being small means less people to choose from within the 50%?
			Concerned?

**Appendix 11: Example of One Participant’s Emergent Themes Clustered to Form Subtheme Prior to Cross Referencing of Subtheme Forming “No Option for Singlehood” and “Urgency to Save Face”**

Master	Subtheme	Emergent themes	Line	Keywords
Adherence to life steps	Done deal Marriage	Marriage as a done deal	24-25	<u>done deal</u>
		Next step; marriage	282-283	<u>certain age marriage it was the next step</u>
		No other options	284	<u>had to get married</u>
		Stick with marriage	2800-2809	<u>stick with it</u>
		Implications of Lack of options to divorce	2800-2809	<u>make a marriage work</u>
		More freedom to assert rights	2800-2809	<u>flexibility to divorce</u>
	Anticipation of marriage	Mother	38	<u>take me to India</u>
		Warning signs	39	<u>alarm bells rang</u>
		Experience	42	<u>you know what’s going to happen</u>
		Assumptions of marriages	70	<u>just assumed</u>
		Self reassurance through assertiveness	76-77	<u>I don’t want</u>
		Influence by other's assumptions	134-436	<u>I naturally assumed</u>
		Worried she would be forced to marry	156-159	<u>I was worried</u>
		Anticipation of marriage	210-216	<u>married them off fairly quickly</u>
		Ahead of expectation	210-216	<u>knew on the cards</u>
	Post love	Lack of emotional connection	871-874	<u>you just don’t know that person</u>
		Fall in love afterwards	872	<u>afterwards</u>
Protecting family name	Marital age	Choice	31	<u>arrangement came through</u>
		Lack of agency	33	<u>carted off to India</u>
		Average Marital age	252-254	<u>around 17 18</u>
		Overwhelming responsibility for a young age	256-260	<u>quite wow</u>

	Marital age to protect women's innocence and family name	Girls to remain pure	1904-1917	<u>sure their virgins</u>
		Tamper with her innocence	1904-1917	girl that's messed up
		Early marriage to avoid bad reputation	1877-1877	<u>in case</u>
		Jumping to conclusions	1889-1900	must be going out
		Protection of family image	1889-1900	<u>protect the family image</u>
		Boy's flexibility	1904-1917	<u>date about</u>
		Marriage as an avoidance of stigma	1979-1986	<u>attached to that is terrible</u>
	Inner conflicts vs marital age	Inner conflicts	94-99	<u>I didn't want to get married</u>
		Lack of emotional maturity to handle marriage responsibility	1105-1112	<u>what it meant to be married</u>
		Lack of learning through experience	1105-1119	<u>went a long with the flow</u>
Upholding cultural traditions	Saving face within society	Upholding traditional practices to save face	195-202	a lot of it
		Behaviour approved	195-202	<u>doing the right thing</u>
		Restricted options	289-290	<u>finding somebody yourself</u>
		Avoidance of a bad reputation	294-299	<u>doesn't hang around with her</u>
		Punishment for rebelling	563-569	<u>few beatings from my dad</u>
	Adhering to cultural traditions	Remorseful father	813-819	<u>felt bad he hadn't given us a choice</u>
		Father compelled by culture	813-819	<u>went along</u>
		Importance of reputation	1077-1083	<u>relationship with someone who's been inside</u>
	Around the culture	Secrecy of relationships	1096	not something parents <u>allowed</u>
		Benefits to finding own partners	2682-2691	<u>impact your parents</u>



## Appendix 12: Example of Two Participants' Masters and Subtheme Themes Clustered Prior to Cross Referencing

6: Master	Cultural, religious and self beliefs	Decision Making	Adopting best of both worlds; the tension	Implications
Subtheme	Marriage part of life	Meaning of choice; empowerment	Challenging women's independence	Riskiness of marriage; fear of marriage dissolution
	Marriage providing safety	Parent's role; Trusting relationship 'best interest'	Pro Arranged marriage; changing views is problematic	Various emotions
	Forbidden intimate relationship prior marriage	Opportunity of Choice: The 'I'	The 'alien' concept of arranged marriages	Fear of the unknown 'OMG'
	Gender inequality	Self happiness vs other's happiness	Do you really know a person?	The experience of incongruence
	Changing marital age	Factors influencing decisions	Western vs Eastern ideals on partnership formation	Coping strategies
	Family comes first	The importance of 'connection'		Help seeking for marriage preparation
		Time vs quickness of the process		
		The systematic process		
		The pressure of other expectations on self		
5: Master	Time and changing cultural traditions	Self and Identity	Choice vs Duty	Loneliness
Subtheme	Changing marriage attitudes 'Alien'	Psychological implication	Bound by duty; life map	Lack of self expression
	Upholding cultural beliefs systems	Coping by acceptance or subjugation self	Implication of resistance to duty	Importance of emotional connection
	The brave face of changes	US vs ME	Lack of permission/choice	The need for time
	Influences on AM		Taking permission	
	Dilemma of two cultures		Emotional blackmail	
	AM limiting human evolution		Importance and trust in others	
			Asked	
			Words of encouragement	

### Appendix 13: Cross Referencing of Subthemes Across All Participants

Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Belief Systems</b>							
The permanence of marriage	x	x		x	x		
Marriage as a necessity 'on the cards'	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Safeness with early marriage	x	x		x	x	x	
Implications of delaying	x		x				x
Assumptions of marriage readiness	x		x?	x			
Importance of 'family name'/honour/respect	x	x		x	x		x
Changing marriage attitudes	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Fear of loss of culture				x	x		
Importance of other's	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Women's roles	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Physical intimacy - forbidden				x	x	x	x
Challenging inequality		x		x		x	
<b>Decision Making</b>							
The tension of early marriage	x	x	x				
Time as a limiting factor; urgency	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Uncertainty	x	x	x			x	
Ripple of pressure	x	x	x		x		
Arranged marriage a problem solver	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Missed placed priorities			x		x		x
Fear inducing			x	x			
Misunderstood			x	x			
Internal conflict	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Trust in Parents 'best interest'	x	x			x	x	x
Influencers of decision	x	x			x		
I don't know him - OMG	x	x	x	x		x	
Other decision makers		x					
Compatibility - The importance			x	x	x	x	x
<b>Agency/Choice</b>							
Lack of escaping 'done deal' Finality				x			x
Right to a choice		x			x		x
Other agents	x	x	x	x		x	x
Being an agent		x	x	x	x	x	x
Control	x	x	x	x		x	
Inclusiveness		x		x	x		x
Self Expression			x	x	x	x	
Autonomy/Empowered						x	
Marriage Choice	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Self permission; gain control	x			x	x	x	x

Self and Identity							
Emotional implications/Wellbeing	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Acceptance of the process		x		x	x		
Subjugate and comply/Self sacrificing	x		x	x	x		x
What about me?/Objectified self	x	x	x	x			x
Ambivalence	x	x	x	x		x	x
Other coping strategies	x	x			x	x	x
Challenged identity/personality delay				x	x		x

#### Appendix 14: Reflective Journal

## REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

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On 11<sup>th</sup> April 2016, I approached Bowhaven a service user led charity in order recruit participants by presenting my research to the Asian women's group. Before addressing the group I was informed that the majority of women there did not speak English, although a few did, so I decided to go ahead and speak to the women. The women were from a Bengali community and of an older generation. Initially I explained who I was and presented my research to the women. The women who spoke English translated for

the other women. The first question that was put to me was “are you married?”. I was taken aback by this question as this was unexpected. I was not sure how to respond. As a therapist, I would have explored why this information is of value to the client. However as a researcher I thought it would not be appropriate and therefore I answered honestly that I wasn’t married. In response, a woman said “no husband, no children?”. Upon reflection, this may suggest how important marriage and children are within their culture. It also demonstrated how embedded this is within their thinking and therefore may be a core principle within their culture or religion. I also wondered whether the fact that I was unmarried suggested that I may not understand them, the process of marriage or their culture. In addition, I was left feeling ashamed, as if I had done something which was not approved of. This was later discussed within my personal therapy. But it may highlight that being unmarried is possibly frowned upon and being single is not accepted within their culture. As I was younger than all of the women, I wonder if they saw me as someone similar to their daughter’s age, and what this meant in terms of the research process.

I did not recruit any of the participants due to the language barrier. This was a sensitive topic and I felt a sense of resistance in speaking to me further and was met with silence during the meeting. This echoes the struggles and barrier, I had been experiencing when recruiting for my research. Thus suggesting forced marriage is an area which people may not want to disclose due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Therefore, further reflections on whether it is viable to conduct this research with this particular sample group needed to be explored further.

Nevertheless this experience was of valuable insight as the women did briefly discuss their understanding of forced marriages. One woman highlighted forced marriage as “not good”. Another suggested that if you have a love marriage, you are not supported by your family and proceeded to say love, arranged and forced marriage as “not good”. This may suggest that either way you can’t win within marriage as there is always a loss with any type of marriage. Furthermore, some women understood the term “forced marriage”, which may suggest that this is not just a western construct and highlights some awareness of these practices being wrong. As I was unable to speak the language, this demonstrated how valuable experience is lost due to language barriers, which is a limitation within my study. This experience highlights how valuable a focus group would be and could be proposed in future studies.

